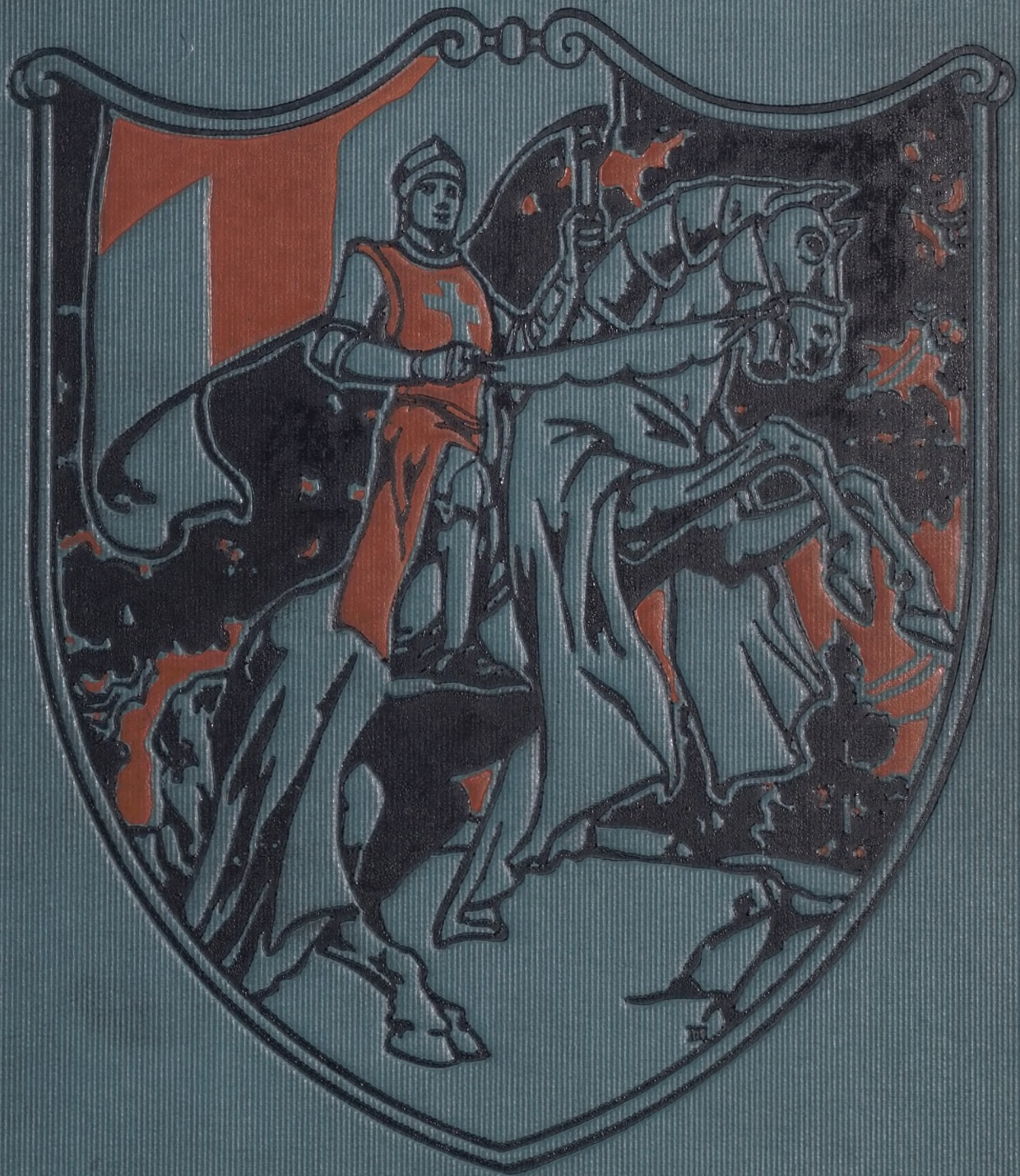


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THE STORY *of* KING ARTHUR

WINONA C. MARTIN





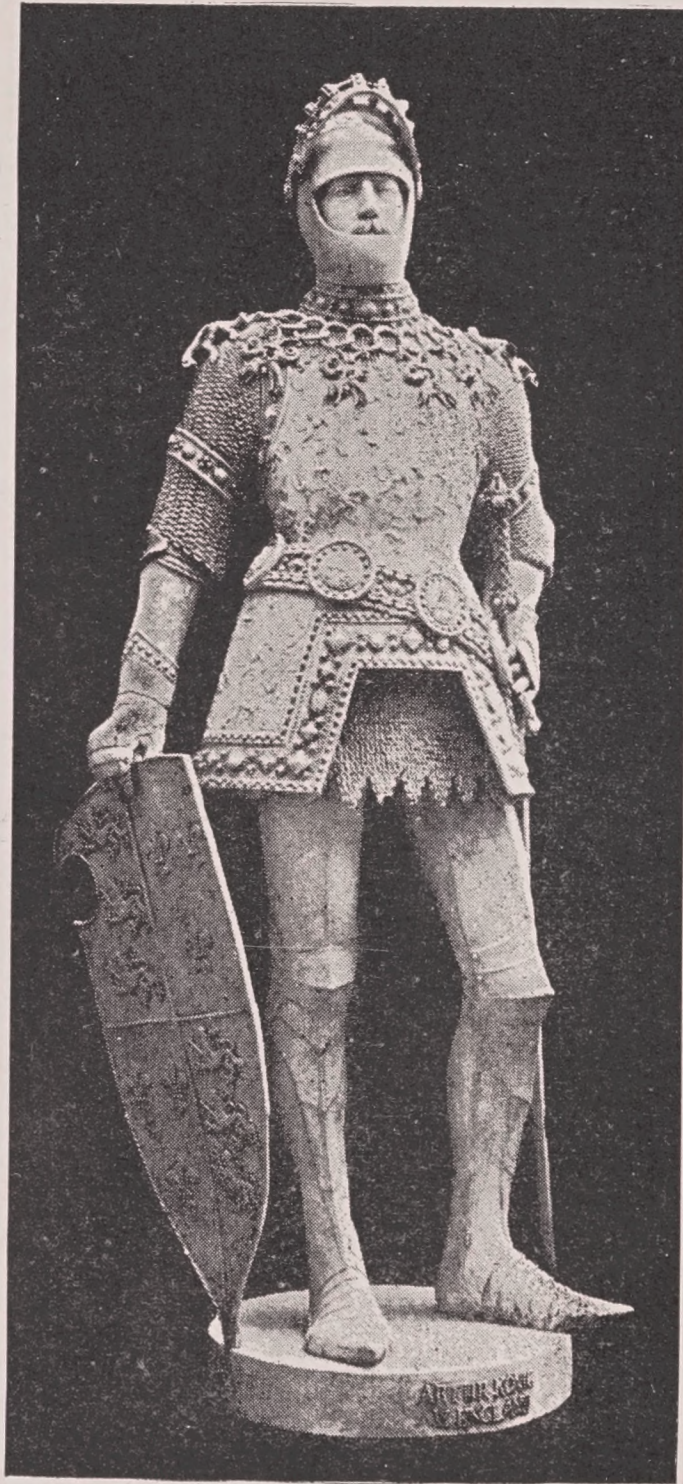
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The Story of King Arthur




King Arthur's Tomb, Innsbruck

*"THAT Arthur who with lance in rest,
From spur to plume a star of tournament,
Shot thro' the lists of Camelot, and charged
Before the eyes of ladies and of Kings."* —Tennyson.

The Story
of
King Arthur
In Twelve Tales

By
Winona C. Martin



The Storytellers Company
New York

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PREFACE

Of all the legends of bygone ages which we in the foremost ranks of time may call our own perhaps none have come to us so fraught with the spirit of lofty idealism as those which cluster about the figure of King Arthur of Britain and the mystic Quest of the Holy Grail.

In their devious wanderings down the centuries they have gradually been purified of all original coarseness while still retaining that wonderful charm and simplicity which belongs to the tales of the childhood of the race. Furthermore, upon the lips of many a bard, both ancient and modern, they have become literature, so that they are now the rightful heritage of the child of to-day, and should, in one form or another, find a place in every class room as supplementary reading at least.

Because, for obvious reasons, in dealing with young children, the versions of the masters have not always proved practicable, the author has ventured to offer this little volume which grew out of a library story-hour trusting that it may be useful to mothers, teachers, children's librarians and others who are endeavoring to hold before the children of a materialistic age that vision without which the people perish.

W. C. M.

DEDICATION

TO THE MEMORY OF A "VERY PERFECT,
GENTLE KNIGHT," THIS LITTLE
BOOK IS DEDICATED.

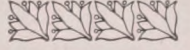
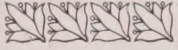
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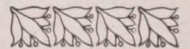
THE ENCHANTED SWORD



THE ENCHANTED SWORD*

Which will sever
the cruel pris-
oning bands

*Perseus,
Burne-Jones.
[Courtesy of
Braun et Cie.]



Heroes

Small Boy is here beside me—
Quiet, just for a space—
No laughter-imps deride me;
A dream-look steals to his face.

And I know that a pageant of marvel
Holds that wide-eyes stare:
Wonderful white-winged carvels,
Skimming both water and air;

OF ACTIONS BRAVE AND STRONG

Weaving of spells by witch-fires,
Waving of wands, and chants;
The Brave Prince lost in the pitch-mires,
The mountain of glass which slants

Dear boy, I shall make a prayer
To be said by me for you;
But the boon that I ask we'll share,
For my heart will rejoice anew.

Terribly upward ever;
The Maiden, wringing her hands;
The Enchanted Sword which will sever
The cruel, prisoning bands.

Heroes throng to the vision
Roland and Oliver,
Arthur of sacred mission
With the brand Excalibur.

The Cid is there, bestriding
Babiaca, poorly named,
And there in humble hiding,
Good Alfred hugely shamed.

By rating of the goodwife—
He burned the cates forsooth
And, hero of the wood-life,
Soft steps an Indian youth:

The forge of Vulcan's flaring,
Leap Brunhilde's magic flames,
While Jack, of dauntless daring,
The towering giant shames.

The Golden Fleece is taken
Down from the dangerous tree;
The Walls of Troy are shaken—
But his gaze comes back to me.



If the vision hall never leave you
Of actions brave and strong,
Of lilies that we love and cleave to
Of strivings to right the wrong:
If, heroes of boyhood discarding,
With heroes indeed you replace,
Knowing and loving and guarding
The heritage of the race.

Gertrude C. Hopkins.



CHARLES ROBINSON

The Story of King Arthur

“And I saw mage Merlin, whose vast wit
And hundred winters are but as the hands
Of Loyal vassals toiling for their liege.”

TENNYSON'S “Coming of Arthur.”

After the last story is told (the Passing of Arthur), and the children standing with Sir Bevidere upon the highest crag of the jutting rock, see the warrior King pass with the three tall queens in the dusky barge beyond the limits of the world, they too, wonder gazing on the splendor of his Passing. Though defeated in the last weird battle in the west, yet he was victorious in his ideals, for he became the spiritual King of his race.

“From the great deep to the great deep he goes.” The children hear but do not quite understand—it is the better for that because something of the mystery of life and death is awakened in the child. In that it serves its highest purpose. It helps the child to realize that there are things in life that eye have not seen nor ear heard, and let it not be forgotten that while we use these great stories for formal work, the formal is always the result of the creative.

“The letter killeth; the spirit giveth life.” Thus it is that child and teacher leave the low plains of the “lesson hearer” and hand in hand walk the upland pastures of the soul.—ED.

I

Merlin and His Prophecies

ONCE, in those dim, far off times when history fades away and is lost in the mists of tradition, there sat upon the throne of Britain a man named Vortigern. Like many another king of his day—and of later days for that matter—he had no right whatever to the crown, for he had gained it by the betrayal of a trust, and, some believed, by a still darker crime. Constantine, his overlord, who had reigned in Britain before him, had, at his death, committed to this Vortigern, his chief minister, the care of his three sons, Constans, the heir, and his two brothers Pendragon and Uther. Soon

after the King's death little Constans had mysteriously disappeared. Then the true friends of the two remaining princes, fearing for their lives, had fled with them across the sea and found refuge for them at the court of France.

All this, however, was now many years ago; and so long had Vortigern's right to rule been unquestioned that he had almost forgotten his crime.

In the early days of his reign he had indeed fought valiantly against the only enemies that the Britons had at that time greatly to fear. These were the tall, fair-haired, blue-eyed Saxons who came from beyond the seas, led by Hengest and Horsa. But as the years had passed, he and his warriors had given themselves up more and more to lives of luxury and idleness, so that at last they had been obliged to make a shameful peace with the enemy, and the Saxons were now gradually becoming masters of the land.

It so happened, therefore, that on the day when our story opens, King Vortigern had gathered his court about him in his capital city of London, there to hold a high festival, and in feasting and carousing to forget the disgrace of their surrender and the ills of the country.

Suddenly, up to the castle gate, through the great portal, along the wide corridors, and into the very banquet-hall itself, never stopping to dismount, rode a breathless messenger.

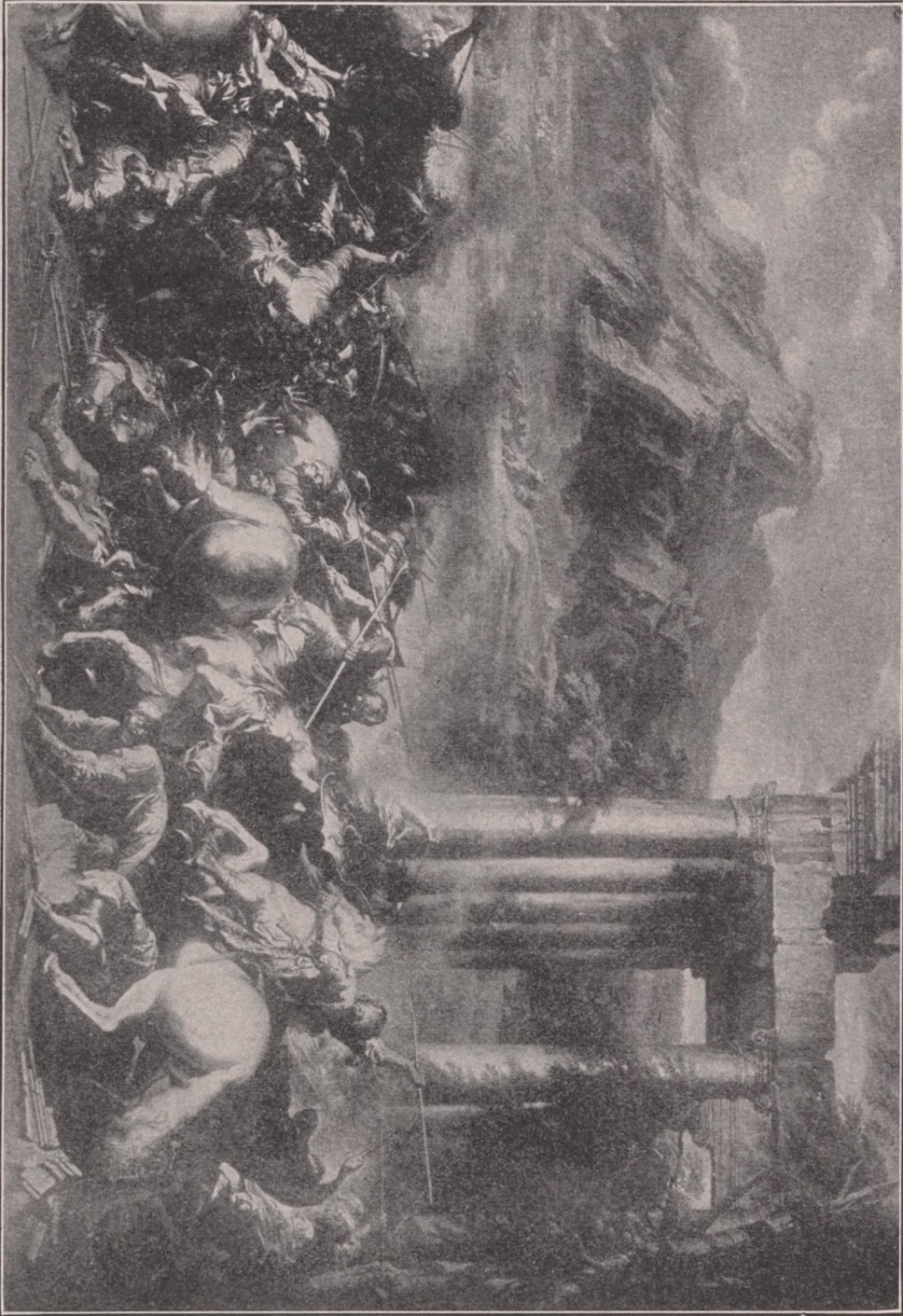
"To arms! Sir King, to arms!" he cried, waiting for no ceremony. "Pendragon and Uther have this day set sail from the coast of France with a mighty army, and they have sworn by a great oath to take your life as you took the life of their brother Constans!"

Then the King remembered, and his face went ashen grey. He turned to one after another of the men who should have been his mighty warriors, and, reading in their flabby cheeks and lustreless eyes the story of their slothful living, knew that his cause was well-nigh lost before the fighting began.

"Summon my messengers!" he was able to say at last, and when these were brought before him:

"Ride! into every corner of my kingdom, ride! And call together the most skillful artificers, craftsmen and mechanics, for I have a great work for them to do."

Within a week the messengers on their fleet horses had scoured



Strife, Rosa

“HE HAD FOUGHT VALIANTLY AGAINST THE ENEMIES”

(Courtesy Braun et cie.)

the land, so that there stood before the King a hundred of the best workmen that Britain could produce.

“Now hear my command,” said he. “On the plain that lies furthest west in my kingdom build me a tower whose walls shall be so firm as to withstand all assault of catapult and battering-ram; and have it ready for my retreat within a hundred days, or your lives, to the last man, shall be forfeited.”

The workmen left the presence of the King with fear in their hearts; but to such good purpose did they labor that within a few days there began to be visible upon the plain the jagged outlines of the walls that were to enclose that mighty tower. Then the weary workmen, for the first time feeling assured that they could accomplish their task within the hundred days, lay down for the night and were soon fast asleep.

With the first pale glimmer of dawn, however, they arose ready to return to their labors with renewed energy. But what a sight met their eyes! The tower lay in ruins! The walls had fallen during the night!

Then with the strength of terror they fell upon their task once more. When the second morning came they turned their gaze half in hope and half in dread toward the scene of their labors, only to have their worst fears confirmed. Once again there lay before them but a heap of ruins!

“We must use larger stones,” said one.

“We have no time to talk,” put in a second. “If our lives are to be spared we must work as we never worked before.”

So all through the long hours of the day they toiled in silence and in dread until the damage of the night had been repaired, only to find when morning came that, for the third time, their tower had crumbled to the ground.

“This is enchantment!” they then cried in despair. “We cannot build the tower. Let us go and throw ourselves before the King to plead for mercy!”

But when Vertigern, with his guilty conscience, heard that word “enchantment,” a greater dread fell upon his heart.

“Lead out these useless artificers,” he thundered, “and summon my wise men.”

And presently the great doors of the throne-room were thrown

open and, one by one, in solemn procession, trailing their black robes, the astrologers, the wizards and the magicians of the realm filed in, until they stood in a silent semi-circle before the King.

At last Vortigern raised his eyes.

"Tell me," he said gloomily, "tell me, O my Wise Men, as you hold in your possession all the secrets of this world, and of other worlds unknown to ordinary mortals, tell me, I adjure you, why my tower of refuge will not stand."

He ceased, and a deep silence fell upon the room. Wizard turned to astrologer, and astrologer to magician, for each knew in his heart that he could give no answer to the question of the King.

At last the oldest man present stepped forward and bowing low, began to speak in deep and solemn tones:

"Your Majesty," said he, "give us we pray you until tomorrow at high noon. This night shall the wizards work their spells and the astrologers consult the stars in their courses. Then shall we be able to tell you why your tower will not stand."

"Let it be so," replied the King, "but also let it be well understood that if at high noon tomorrow you are still unable to answer, your lives shall pay the penalty, even as the lives of my workmen shall pay the penalty if they do not raise my tower within the hundred days. Fail me not, my Wise Men!"

That night, far down in the deepest dungeons of the castle, the wizards gathered together about a steaming cauldron, vainly chanted their incantations and worked their magic spells, while on the highest battlements, the black-robed astrologers watched the stars from evening until morning; but when the day-star itself faded from their sight in the paling blue of dawn, they were no wiser than at the beginning of their vigil.

"What shall we do?" they cried to one another in consternation when the two companies of watchers had met to report their failures.

"Hush! Speak low!" whispered the Sage. "We must pretend. It is the only way to save ourselves. I have a plan."

And as they gathered about him he continued:

"You all know the prophecy—that a child who never had mortal parents shall soon appear among us, and that he shall be able to read more in the stars than the wisest of our astrologers, that he shall be

a greater magician than the greatest of us, and that through him we shall lose our power and pass away?"

"Ah! yes, we have heard," they answered, shaking their white heads mournfully.

"That child," continued the Sage, "is living somewhere in Britain at this very moment, and his name is Merlin. Let us tell the King that his tower, to make it stand, needs but the blood of this child sprinkled upon its foundations. So shall we by the same act save our lives and rid ourselves of one who otherwise will surely work us harm."

Then the Wise Men bowed their heads and answered:

"You have spoken the words of wisdom."

So at high noon that day, when they were once more gathered about the throne, they gave their answer:

"Seek, your Majesty," said they, "a child named Merlin who never had mortal parents. Sprinkle his blood upon the foundations of your tower. Then will it stand until the end of time."

Thereupon the King summoned his messengers and gave the order:

"Ride! into every town, village and hamlet of my kingdom, ride! And seek this child until you find him; but know that if he is not brought to me within ten days, your lives shall be forfeited, and not yours alone, but also the lives of my Wise Men for giving me useless knowledge, and the lives of my workmen for doing useless work! Ride!"

Then out from old London Town, north and south and east and west, up hill and down dale, over mountains and across rivers, rode the King's messengers on their strange quest. One day, two days, three, four, five and six days, seven days, eight days; and when the ninth day came two of them found themselves far from home, riding through the street of a tiny hamlet.

"What is the use of seeking further?" said one. "For my part I do not believe, for all the Wise Men say, that there ever was or ever could be such a child."

"I fear you are right," replied his companion, "we may as well give up the search and flee for our lives."

As he spoke the last words, however, the men were obliged to draw rein lest their horses should trample upon a crowd of children who were quarreling in the narrow street. One urchin had just given

another a sharp blow across the face, whereupon his victim was proceeding to vent his rage in words that immediately arrested the attention of the messengers.

“How dare *you* strike *me*?” he was screaming at the top of his shrill little voice. “You who came nobody knows from where, and who never had a father or a mother!”

In an instant one of the men had slipped from his horse. Then, having seized both boys, he drew them aside that he might question them. Very soon boys and men found themselves the centre of an interested group of villagers each one of whom seemed more anxious than his neighbor to give all the information that he happened to possess on the subject.

“Yes, his name is Merlin,” said one, “and he was cast upon our shores by the waves of the sea.”

“Not at all!” interrupted another. “He was brought to our village in the night by evil spirits.”

And so it went, but the anxious messengers soon cut short their eloquence.

“If your name is Merlin,” said they to the lad, “and you do not know who your father and mother are, you must come with us. It is ~~the~~ the command of the King.”

“I am quite willing,” replied the boy with unexpected meekness.

“Perhaps he would not be so willing,” whispered one of the messengers under his breath to his companion, “if he knew why he is wanted.”

“I hear what you say,” Merlin broke in, “and what is more, I know what you mean; but just the same, I am willing to go with you to King Vortigern. In fact I struck the boy knowing what he would say and what you would do; so you see I am not afraid.”

On the tenth day after the departure of his couriers, the King sat alone in his audience chamber. Suddenly the great doors were swung wide, and a boy wearing the simple dress of a tiller of the soil appeared before him.

“Your Majesty,” said he, “I am Merlin, the child who never had father or mother. You sent for me because your Wise Men have said that my blood is needed to make your strong tower stand. They have told you an untruth because they know nothing about the tower,

and also because they are my enemies. I ask only that you call them together so that I can prove to you that what I say is so."

Then, at the astonished King's command, the great bell of the castle was tolled, and presently the black-robed astrologers, wizards and magicians filed once again into the royal presence.

"You may question my Wise Men now," said the King to Merlin, "and save yourself if you can."

"Tell us, then, O Prophets of King Vortigern," cried the boy, "what lies under the plain where the King has tried to build his tower."

Then the Wise Ones drew apart that they might take counsel together, and presently the Sage stepped before the King and said:

"Your Majesty, we are now ready to give our answer. We who have the power to look deep into the bowels of the earth know well that beneath the plain where you have sought to build your tower, should you dig never so deep, you would find nothing but the good, brown soil of your Majesty's kingdom."

At this Merlin smiled and shook his dark curls.

"You tell us, then," said the King.

"Let your workmen dig," replied the boy, "and beneath the plain they will find a deep pool."

And when the workmen had dug, they found, just as Merlin had prophesied—a deep, dark pool beneath the plain.

Then cried the King:

"My Wise Men have been put to shame by this mere lad. His life shall be spared; but they, for their deceit, shall be driven in disgrace from my kingdom."

But Merlin interposed, saying:

"Not yet, Sir King, I pray you. Let us have another test that you may feel perfectly sure. Ask your Wise Men what lies under the pool that lay under the plain where you sought to build your tower."

Again the Wise Ones talked together; and again because they knew not what else to say, they gave the same answer:

"Sir King, you will find good, brown earth beneath the pool that lay beneath the plain where your Majesty sought to build his tower."

"No, Sir King," said Merlin. "Beneath the pool you will find two great stones. Let your workmen drain the pool and see."

And when the pool was drained, there lay two immense boulders, just as Merlin had said.

“Truly this is a marvelous child,” exclaimed Vortigern. “Away with my false prophets! From this time forth I will have no Wise Man but Merlin!”

“Stay, your Majesty,” said Merlin. “Let there be one more test, then no question can ever arise in your mind. Ask your Wise Men what lies beneath the stones that lay beneath the pool that lay beneath the plain where you sought to build your tower.”

But this time the Wise Ones were wise enough to hold their peace.

“Very well,” said Merlin, “then I will tell you. Beneath the stones you will find two great dragons, one red, the other white. During the day these monsters sleep, but at night they awaken and fight; and it was because of their terrible underground battles that your tower could not be made to stand. The night following the raising of the stones they will fight for the last time; for the red dragon will kill the white one, and after that, O Mighty King, you may build your tower in peace.”

Then the Wise Ones trembled, and silently they followed the King and Merlin across the plain to watch the fatal raising of the stones.

When at last the mighty boulders had yielded to the combined strength of all the workmen, there, before the eyes of the crowds that had gathered, lay the two dragons—fast asleep.

“Now send the people away,” said Merlin to the King, “but you and I must stay here and watch, for at midnight the dragons will fight their last battle.”

And when the crowds had dispersed, and the Wise Men slunk away one by one, Vortigern and the boy Merlin sat alone together on the brink of the pool as the evening shadows fell.

The air grew chill. Presently the moon arose, shedding its weird light upon the strange scene; and still the dragons slept on. Toward midnight Merlin leaned forward, and, lightly touching the King’s arm, whispered:

“See! They are about to awaken. Make no noise!”

Then slowly, and still drowsily, the great white dragon stirred and opened his hideous eyes, while along his whole scaly body there ran a shudder. This seemed to arouse the red monster from his dreams, for before King Vortigern could draw breath, the two terrible creatures

had risen on their bat-like wings far above his head, and, with fire streaming from their nostrils, were gnashing upon each other with their fangs, and striking at each other with their ugly claws.

For an hour or more the awful battle continued, sometimes far above their heads, and sometimes perilously near them on the earth; and it seemed to the King that neither would ever be able to gain an advantage—so well were they matched. After a while, however, the white beast began to show signs of weakening; and at last with a mighty crash, he fell to the ground—dead. Then the red dragon spread his wings, and with a strange hissing sound vanished into the shadows of the night, never to be seen again by mortal eyes.

“Tell me,” said the King when he could find sufficient voice to speak, “Tell me, O wonderful boy that you are, what do these strange things mean?”

“I will tell you, O mighty King, without fear or favor,” replied Merlin, “although I know full well that what I have to say will not be at all to your liking. You may build your tower now, for there is nothing to hinder you; and you may shut yourself up within its strong walls. Nevertheless, Pendragon and Uther, the sons of King Constantine whose trust you betrayed, and the brothers of the young heir Constans whom you so cruelly murdered, have today landed on your shores with a mighty army. Forty days and forty nights shall the siege continue, and at the end of that time your tower shall be destroyed with every living soul within its walls.

“Then shall reign in Britain first Pendragon and afterwards Uther; and all the days of their lives they shall war against the Saxon whom you, Sir King, have brought to this land. The White Dragon stands for the Saxon, and the Red Dragon for the Briton. Long and deadly shall be the strife between them, but in the fulness of time there shall be born to Uther a son whose name shall be called ARTHUR. He shall be the greatest king that these Islands are destined ever to know. He and his wonderful knights shall make war on the Saxon and drive him from the land. So shall the mischief of your reign be repaired—for a season.”

Then the King, still clinging to the shadow of his former hope, hastened the building of his tower, and shut himself within its mighty walls. Nevertheless, within forty days after the beginning of the siege, having been driven back time and again, Pendragon and Uther,

counselled by Merlin, threw burning brands over the ramparts, so that the tower took fire and burned with a mighty conflagration until all within had perished.

Thus was Merlin's prophecy concerning Vortigern fulfilled; and as for his other prophecies—that is another story.

GLOSSARY FOR BEGINNERS

1. *Adjure*, to charge or entreat solemnly. 2. *Artificer*, one who works or constructs with skill. 3. *Astrologer*, one who reads the supposed destinies of men in the stars. 4. *Battering-ram*, a long beam, usually with a heavy head, used in making breaches in walls. 5. *Boulder*, a stone or rock. 6. *Catapult*, a military engine used for throwing stones. 7. *Cauldron*, a large kettle or boiler. 8. *Hamlet*, a small village. 9. *Incantations*, the saying or singing of magical words for enchantment. 10. *Over-lord*, a king or chief who held authority over other lords. 11. *Quest*, a search. 12. *Realm*, a kingdom. 13. *Sage*, a wise man. 14. *Vigil*, a night watch. 15. *Wizard*, one having the power of magic; a male witch.

II

How Arthur Won His Kingdom

“For many a petty king ere Arthur came
Ruled in this isle, and ever waging war
Each upon other, wasted all the land;
And still from time to time the heathen host
Swarm'd overseas, and harried what was left.
And so there grew great tracts of wilderness,
Wherein the beast was ever more and more,
But man was less and less, till Arthur came.”

TENNYSON'S "Coming of Arthur."

“**N**OW, my Lords, Vortigern the usurper is dead, and you must turn your attention to Hengist with his Saxon hordes; for between his people and yours shall be the struggle for the possession of this fair land of Britain.”

It was Merlin who spoke, and he stood in the throne room in the old castle of Constantine, before Pendragon and Uther, the exiled princes who had at last come into their own again.

They looked at the child with curiosity mingled with awe, and presently Pendragon said:

“You are a wonderful boy, Merlin, for by your counsel you have helped us to overthrow Vortigern. Now tell us, if you can, who shall be victorious in this struggle between Briton and Saxon.”

“Come to the window,” Merlin replied, “and I will show you a strange sight.” Then, followed by the young princes, he crossed the hall, drew aside the heavy hangings of scarlet samite that shut out the cool night air, and, having done so, pointed to the starlit sky.

“See!” said he, stepping back so as not to obstruct the view.

The princes looked, and beheld a strange sight indeed; for in the heavens there blazed a comet of enormous size, whose dragon-shaped tail was like a cloud of fire, from the mouth of which shot forth two

long rays, one stretching away over the sunny land of France, the other ending in seven smaller rays over the Irish Sea.

"Tell us, Merlin, what do these things mean?" they asked.

"Hear, then, the interpretation," replied Merlin. "On Salisbury Plain there shall be a great battle fought, and the outcome is still uncertain. If you ask my aid, however, the British arms shall be victorious. Nevertheless, one of you, which one I may not tell, shall be slain, but the other shall become King of Britain. Then shall he that is King take his brother's name and add it to his own, that the dead man's memory may not perish from the earth. Furthermore, he shall raise over his lost brother's grave a monument that shall stand forever. The comet signifies the one who shall survive, and the rays over France and Ireland show that he shall have a son mightier than himself who shall hold sway over the lands that the rays cover. The name of that son shall be called ARTHUR, and he shall drive the heathen from the realm."

"Then, Merlin, you will help us in this battle?" asked both brothers together.

"I will help you," replied Merlin, "on one condition."

"What is that?" they inquired.

"That whichever one of you comes through victorious shall give me his first son on the day of his birth; for I must bring him up if he is to be fitted for his great part in life."

Then, because the battle seemed to them a thing so terribly near, and the birth of a son a thing so far in the future, they were willing enough to agree.

"Promise," said Merlin, turning first to Pendragon.

"I promise," said the young man gravely.

"Promise," repeated the boy to Uther.

And like his brother Uther answered, "I promise."

"Then I will give you my aid," swore Merlin; and he kept his word, for on the day of that terrible battle the Saxons were driven from the field with great slaughter; but when the Britons returned from the pursuit to seek their wounded, they found Pendragon dead upon the plain with all his wounds in front.

"He died as he lived, like a brave soldier," said Uther. "And now, Merlin, tell me how I may keep my promise to raise to his memory a monument that shall stand forever."

“Forever is a long time; nevertheless,” counselled Merlin, “send to Ireland for the Giants’ Dance.”

“And what may the Giants’ Dance be?” inquired Uther.

“A great circle of stones,” replied Merlin, “that the giants brought from Africa many years ago. Send for these stones, then you will have a monument that shall stand to the end of time.”

So Uther sent great ships to Ireland, and with Merlin’s aid secured the magic stones and had them set up on Salisbury Plain in a great circle which the people called ever after “Stonehenge,” and there those same stones stand, or lie, to this very day.

After that Uther caused two great golden dragons to be made in the likeness of the beast he had seen in the tail of the comet. One of these he gave to the Cathedral at Winchester, and the other he carried before him on his standard into all his battles. Then he added his brother’s name to his own, so that he was known ever after as Uther Pendragon—the “Dragon’s Head.” So he reigned in Britain in place of Vortigern the usurper, and fought against the Saxon, whom Vortigern had brought to the land, all the days of his life.

Now it happened, when he had been king some years, that there came a time of great rejoicing in the realm, for at dusk on the Day of the Feast of Pentecost the old bell in the castle tower rang out a merry peal announcing to the people far and wide that a son had been born to King Uther Pendragon and his beautiful Queen Igera. So there was joy in the palace and in all the country round, but Uther alone did not rejoice, for he remembered his promise to Merlin.

When the shades of night had fallen, therefore, he took his tiny baby boy in his arms, held him for a moment so that Queen Igera might press her white lips against his little cheek, then he himself dressed the child in rich cloth of gold as befitted a king’s son, and, having sworn them to secrecy, gave him to two brave knights and two fair ladies of the court with instructions to ask no questions, but deliver him to the care of an old man whom they would find waiting at the postern gate.

The knights and ladies were greatly astonished at this seemingly unreasonable command; nevertheless, they dared not disobey the King, so they did as they were told, and sorrowfully stood at the gate as the strange old man disappeared with the royal child into the shadows of the night. Long afterwards, however, when their lips were

unsealed, they told strange tales of a light that had shone about the baby's head just before he was swallowed up in the darkness, and of fairy faces that had bent tenderly over his helpless form.

So the longed-for heir was carried away on the very night of his birth from his father's palace by Merlin—for the old man was he in his favorite disguise, and none knew, not even King Uther and Queen



“SO THE LAND BECAME DESOLATE”

Igerna, what had become of him. The people, however, believed that he was dead.

Two years passed by during which time Uther fought many brave battles against the Saxons, but at last there came a day when he was brought home ill of a fatal malady, and there was great lamentation throughout the realm because he was leaving no heir to succeed him. For three days he had lain speechless, and at last his ministers called for Merlin and begged his help.

“The King is so ill,” said they, “that he cannot make it known

whom he will have to reign in his stead when he is gone, and you know what that means, Merlin. All the mighty barons will struggle for the possession of the crown, and the land will be wasted through their strife. Tell us, O Man of Wisdom, what must we do?"

"Call these same mighty barons together," said Merlin, "and before them all I will make him speak."

He vanished, but his command was obeyed; and when the great lords of the realm had gathered silently in the chamber of their dying monarch, Merlin suddenly reappeared in their midst.

"Sir King," said he, "as you are about to depart from your people, tell them, that all may hear, who shall reign in Britain when you are gone?"

Slowly the large eyes of Uther Pendragon opened, and he gazed first at Merlin, then at his barons many of whom were but waiting, as he knew well enough, until the breath had left his body before falling upon each other in a wild and lawless struggle for the crown. Then his tongue was loosed and speaking clearly and distinctly, that none might fail to understand, he said:

"My own son Arthur shall reign in Britain after me. He shall be a greater and nobler king than I have been, and he shall drive the Saxon from the land."

"The King's mind wanders," said the people. But Uther did not hear them, for, having spoken, he turned his face to the wall and died; and when they looked about for Merlin, strange to say, he too had disappeared.

Then followed the saddest years that the country of Britain had ever known. There was no longer any law in the land, for each mighty baron was little more than a robber to steal from those of his own rank, and guarding the interests of the poor peasants dependent upon him as the wolf guards the flock. Furthermore, each gathered his forces together and tried by the power of his might, which was the only right then respected, to seize the crown. So the land became desolate, the dreaded Saxon made his raids unmolested, the grain fields were trampled, houses were burned, and strong men were thrown into prison for debt while their wives and children starved.

Thus fifteen years passed away, and the people in their misery cried:

"Woe to the fair land of Britain! Oh! that Uther had left us a son whose strong arm would have kept order in the realm!"



“GREY FAMINE STALKED ABROAD”*

*Burne-Jones, Henderson Collection, Manchester

[*Courtesy of Braun et Cie.*]

Yet all the time Merlin kept himself hidden away, so that none had seen him since the hour of the King's death.

There came at last a winter when the snow fell early and lay deep upon the ground, and grey Famine stalked abroad throughout the country side. Then Brice, the good Archbishop of Canterbury, burdened with the misery of his people, withdrew himself for a season of fasting and prayer. One morning, as he was bringing a long night watch to a close, he turned and saw standing before him in the dim light an old man with a flowing white beard.

"Merlin, Merlin at last!" he cried in joy. "Where have you kept yourself these fifteen long years while the land of Uther has been desolate?"

"That I may not tell you," replied Merlin, and the sound of his voice gladdened the heart of the Holy Man. "That I may not tell you, and you must not ask; but now I am here, and I am come to help you in your great need."

"Then tell me," said the Archbishop, "where I may find a man with a hand firm enough to rule over these robber barons, yet with a heart of mercy that will cause him to deal justly with rich and poor alike."

"Such a man there surely is," and Merlin looked wiser than ever, "but you must find him for yourself, otherwise he would not be received."

"Alas! I have sought him in vain these fifteen years," replied the good man sadly. "If he can be found, give us your aid, Merlin, and do not deceive me, for my people are perishing."

"Listen well to my advice, then," warned Merlin. "Call together the lords of the realm, and bid them come to London to keep the Christmas feast—at that time shall a miracle be wrought to show who is the rightful king."

Then the messengers rode forth, north and south and east and west, so that the great men were gathered together on Christmas Eve that they might spend the Holy Night confessing their sins before hearing mass at break of day; and when all was over, and the pale streaks of dawn were appearing in the wintry sky, a strange sight met their eyes: In the churchyard, against the high altar, stood a great stone four feet square. Upon the stone was set an anvil of steel one foot high, and into the anvil was thrust a sword of

curious workmanship upon whose bejewelled hilt were engraved these words:

*'WHOSO PULLETH OUT THIS SWORD OF THIS STONE AND ANVIL,
IS RIGHTWISE KING BORN OF ALL ENGLAND.'*

At that sight a thrill of joy shot through the heart of every man present. Each robber baron thought to himself: "Now is my chance to show that I am best fitted to wield the sceptre of Uther Pendragon." But the lips of the good Archbishop moved in a prayer of thankfulness:

"Praise God, the miracle!" he murmured reverently. Then in a clear, ringing voice he gave the command:

"Arrange yourselves, my Lords, in the order of your rank—tributary king, duke, earl, count, baron, and simple knight, then beginning at the highest let each come forward to try this adventure of the sword."

So they came, those mighty men of a hundred battles, Uther's warriors tested and tried; and each in turn tugged with all his might upon the jewelled hilt of the sword, but never did it stir by a hair's breadth for the mightiest of them. And when the most lowly knight had proved himself as powerless as the most haughty tributary king, the Archbishop turned to the amazed company, saying:

"My Lords, I see that this is a question of purity of heart as well as of strength of muscle, and I fear the best knight of the realm is not, after all, among us to-day. Therefore there must be another trial. I will, then appoint Twelfth Day for this second test. See to it that the news is spread abroad so that every gentleman of arms of whatever rank shall be present without fail."

Now it was the custom of those times, whenever knights were gathered together in large numbers, to hold tournaments, which were in reality sham battles. So it happened that while the Lords remained in London awaiting the second trial of the sword, they decided to amuse themselves in true knightly fashion by holding such a tournament on New Year's Day in the fields outside the town. And truly, a great sight it was—that gathering of gentlemen of arms, with their glittering armor, flashing swords, streaming banners, and prancing horses—well worth the enthusiasm of the great crowd of commoners that had gathered to see them.

A great sight indeed, and not one that either noble or commoner

would willingly miss. All along the King's highway, therefore, that first crisp winter's morning of the New Year rode one of the few true hearted knights still left in Britain—Sir Ector the Upright, accompanied by his newly-knighted son Sir Kay, and with them, because he had begged to be permitted to see the tourney, rode a younger son, Arthur, a lad of seventeen who acted as his brother's squire. This fair-haired, blue-eyed boy watched eagerly the gathering of the knights, and felt his heart thrill within him at the thought that some day, if he performed his present humble duties as well as lay in his power, he too might hope to receive the order of knighthood.

As the three neared the lists Sir Kay suddenly made a distressing discovery—he had left his sword at home! Turning quickly to Arthur, therefore, and speaking none too gently—as is the way at times with big brothers, he said:

“Ride back, boy, and get my sword; and see to it that you hurry too, so that I need not miss any of the jousts.”

Now Arthur was longing to see all that there was to be seen; moreover, like the spirited boy he was, he resented his brother's tone of command. Then he remembered that only a good squire could ever hope to become a worthy knight, so he answered meekly enough:

“Certainly I will go, Kay,” and away he went without a murmur.

When he reached his home, however, what was his distress to find the drawbridge raised, and every door and window barred and bolted; for the servants, taking advantage of their master's absence, had deserted their posts and gone to mingle with the crowd at the tournament.

“Alas! I cannot cross the moat, and I could not break in if I did,” he cried in dismay. So he turned and rode back to London sad because he must fail in even so humble a quest.

Now it happened that his way lay past the churchyard, and it also happened that because of his youth and insignificance no one had thought it worth while to tell him about the mystic sword in the anvil. When he rode past, therefore, and saw an unused weapon it occurred to him that it would do no harm to borrow it for the day, that his brother need not be without a sword.

So he slipped from his horse, stepped inside the enclosure, and looked about for some one whose permission he might ask. But the church was as deserted as his own castle had been. At last, seeing

no other way out of the difficulty, he lightly took the sword by the hilt, and, never stopping to read the words engraved upon it, drew it forth from the anvil as easily as he might have drawn the play-sword of his childhood, long since discarded, from its tiny scabbard. Then gladly he spurred his horse that he might the sooner deliver the weapon into his brother's hand.



“THE KNIGHT'S VIGIL”*

* The Vigil, Pettie, Tate Gallery, London. [Courtesy of Braun et Cie.]

But when Sir Kay saw that bejewelled hilt, a dull red flush suffused his cheek, and a strange sparkle leapt into his eyes.

“Where did you get this, Arthur?” he whispered eagerly, drawing the boy aside that none might overhear the conversation.

“In the churchyard,” replied Arthur innocently. “I will take it back as soon as you have finished with it, Kay, so there is no harm done, is there?”

“There is no harm done yet if you were not seen and can keep silent,” said Kay mysteriously. “Hush! don't speak of it to anyone.”

Then he rode away, leaving his young brother awed and full of fear lest he had done some wicked deed.

Kay, however, lost no time in seeking his father, before whom he triumphantly displayed the weapon, crying:

“See, Father, I, your son, have drawn the sword from the anvil; therefore I am the rightful King of Britain!”

But the good Sir Ector, after looking first at the sword and then at Kay, laid his hand on the young man’s shoulder and said gravely:

“Kay, Kay, tell me the truth, by the honor of your knighthood, how came you by that sword?”

Then Kay, whose eyes could not meet his father’s, hung his head in shame and answered:

“My brother Arthur brought it to me.”

“Send the boy here,” commanded Sir Ector; and when Arthur stood before him he asked more gravely than ever:

“Arthur, how did you come by this sword?”

And the lad, though now quite convinced that he had unwittingly done some great wrong, looked up into his father’s face and answered bravely:

“I drew it from the anvil that stands on the stone in the churchyard. If it was not right, Father, I am sorry.”

“Arthur,” said Sir Ector, and now his voice was stern, “Tell me the truth, as you hope one day to become a brave and honorable knight, where did you find this sword?”

Again Arthur looked up into his father’s face, repeating his former words; then Sir Ector could doubt no longer.

“Come with me to the good Archbishop,” said he, “that we may tell him the whole story.”

When the Archbishop had heard all, he said gravely:

“Put the sword back into the anvil, my boy, and let it remain there until Twelfth Day. If you can pull it out then, before all the lords of the realm after they have tried for the second time and failed, then, young as you are, we shall know that our prayers have been answered, and that God himself has given us a King.”

So on Twelfth Day the nobles were again assembled, and when mass had been said the trial began for a second time. But just as before, tributary king, duke, earl, count, baron and simple knight each came forward in his turn and tugged and pulled with all his might

—in vain. Then, when the last knight had turned away defeated, the voice of the Archbishop was heard above the tumult:

“Stay yet a while, my Lords,” said he, “there is still another to make the trial.”

They halted, and to the scornful amazement of all, out from an obscure corner stepped a lad in the simple dress of a squire. Modestly, with flushed cheeks and lowered eyelids, he passed through their midst straight up to the great stone, and, with no effort, using but one hand, drew the glittering sword from its firm seat in the anvil!

For a moment a deep hush fell upon the company; then there began to be heard an angry murmur like the rumble of a fast-approaching storm.

“Who is this boy?” one knight was asking another. “The son of Sir Ector in whose veins there runs no noble blood,” came the answer from one or two. “Away with him, then, away with him!” they all cried together. “Miracle or no miracle, we will not have this beardless boy to reign over us!”

The good Archbishop, with the exception of Sir Ector, was the only one that had been truly glad; but now, as he looked down upon that sea of angry faces, the words that were about to proclaim Arthur king died on his lips, for he feared lest these men should fall upon the child and take his life. Suddenly, invisible to all others, Merlin stood once again at the Holy Man’s side.

“Tell them,” said he, “to return to their homes and to gather again on Candlemas Day for a third trial.”

So the angry multitude was safely dispersed.

But on Candlemas Day the same scene was re-enacted, and so again at Easter; but still the lords would not submit. Then Merlin said to the Holy Man:

“Tell them that there will be one last and final test at the Feast of Pentecost. That at that time they must bring together all their mighty men, all the flower of their knighthood, and that he that draws the sword on that day is without further question King of Britain.”

So at that Feast of Pentecost, more than fifteen years after the death of Uther Pendragon, the mighty men of the realm were once again gathered together in old London Town. Then for the fifth time, with might and main they made the trial of the sword—without

success; but when, for the fourth time, before them all, the boy Arthur had lightly drawn it from the anvil, Merlin appeared to the whole company standing at the lad's side.

"My Lords of Britain," said he, "you have sought to reject this boy because you thought him not of royal blood. Sir Ector, tell us, is he your son?"

Then, to the amazement of all, Sir Ector the Upright whose word none could doubt, answered simply:

"He is not, though I have loved and cherished him as my own since the day you brought him to me, Merlin, a baby but a few hours old."

"Now hear the truth," continued Merlin. "Your King, Uther Pendragon, was not wandering in his mind when he spoke those words on his deathbed. Eighteen years ago today there was born to King Uther and his Queen the beautiful Igera a son. That child, that he might be kept safe during the helpless years of his infancy and that he might be made fit to rule in justice and in mercy over this troubled land, was delivered to me at the postern gate. I took him to Sir Ector, the most upright knight among you, with strict instructions that he be kept in ignorance of his birth."

Then Merlin, taking the boy's hand, led him forth where he might be seen not only by the nobles, but also by the crowd of commoners that had gathered to see the outcome; and with a loud voice he cried:

"People of Britain, behold your King! Arthur, son of Uther Pendragon, the Child of Prophecy, he that shall restore peace and drive the heathen from the realm!"

Then, like a deep roar, from a thousand throats came the glad response:

"Long live Arthur! Long live the King!"

GLOSSARY 2

1. *Commoner*, one not of the nobility. 2. *Drawbridge*, a bridge that can be raised or lowered. 3. *Hilt*, the handle of a sword. 4. *Joust*, a tilt between two knights. 5. *Lists*, the field where tournaments took place. 6. *Moat*, a ditch around a castle. 7. *Quest*, a search. 8. *Samite*, a cloth like satin. 9. *Squire*, one who waited upon a knight. 10. *Standard*, a flag or banner. 11. *Tournament*, Tourney, a tilt between knights on horseback. 12. *Tributary King*, one who paid a tax.
1. *Candlemas Day*, February 2, the day when the candles were to be blessed. 2. *Archbishop of Canterbury*, the head of the Church of England. 3. *Pentecost*, the fiftieth day, and the seventh Sunday after Easter (sometimes called Whitsunday.) 4. *Twelfth Day*, the twelfth day after Christmas.

III

How Arthur Won His Sword

“Excalibur,” His Bride and His Round Table

“But Arthur, looking downward as he passed,
Felt the light of her eyes into his life
Smite on the sudden.”

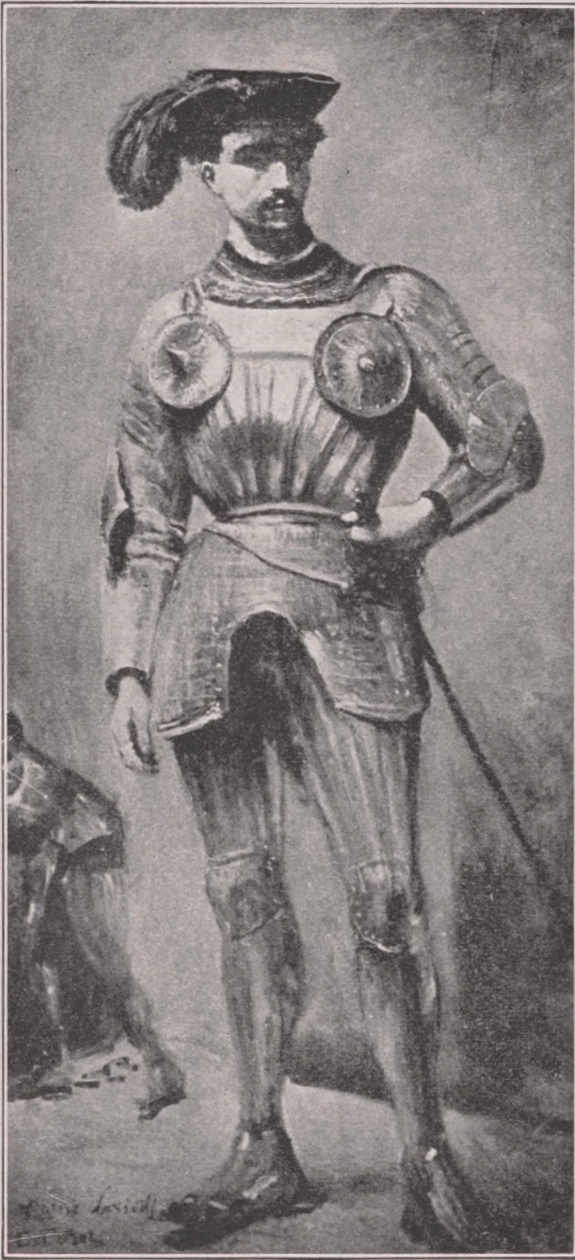
TENNYSON'S “Coming of Arthur.”

THE commoners had indeed shouted joyfully, “Long live the King!” and many of the nobles also had been glad to see the end of the long struggle for the crown; but there were others, strong and mighty warriors, who were not yet willing to submit to the rule of a “beardless boy.” The first year of Arthur's reign, therefore, was a turbulent one; for, between the rebellion of his own subjects on the one hand, and the raids of the Saxons on the other, he scarcely knew what it was to lay aside his armor for so much as a single day.

Gradually, however, the young King's bravery and nobility of character began to call forth the respect of those who were watching his career, so that one by one the knights of his realm, conquered either by force of arms or better still by admiration, came to pay him homage; and very soon even those robber barons found themselves being transformed under the chivalric influences that prevailed at that court.

Soon after his coronation Arthur appointed his officers. At the request of the good Sir Ector, whom the young King would always regard as a father, he appointed his foster brother, Sir Kay, seneschal of all Britain. Then he remembered old friends of his real father, Uther Pendragon, and made Sir Baldwin constable, Sir Ulfius chamberlain, and Sir Brastias warden of the country north of the River Trent.

This done, he fought twelve great battles to bring into subjection the tributary kings who still held out against him. Then he



"SIR ECTOR"*

*The Knight, Corot

[Courtesy Braun et Cie.]

felt that his realm was in about as good order as he could well expect it to be in those wild and lawless times.

In all these battles the sword that he had drawn from the anvil served him well, but strange to say one day when he was jousting with a single knight the latter's stronger weapon cut Arthur's sword in two, leaving the young King defenseless, so that he was severely wounded and would probably have been killed had it not been for Merlin, who bore him away to a hermitage where he lay ill for three days. During that time, however, it was not so much by his suffering that he was troubled as by the discovery of the loss of his sword; but when he made his anxiety known to Merlin, the Wise Man merely smiled one of those mysterious smiles of his and said:

"That, Sir King, is perhaps the best thing that ever happened to you. As soon as you are strong enough to wield it you shall have a far better weapon, I promise you."

By the third day, therefore, no entreaties could prevail upon him to remain under the care of the kindly hermit any longer.

"I must be up and away to find that sword," said he. So Merlin answered: "Very well. Follow me."

Then off they rode up hill and down dale through a strange and wonderful country, until at last they came to the shores of a broad

and beautiful lake over which a fairy veil of light morning mist was still hanging. They drew rein in silence and watched the sun gradually rise from behind the distant hill tops. Presently, under the gentle warmth, the mist began to lift, so that very soon the waters lay before them, clear as crystal and shimmering in the glorious morning light. Then a strange thing happened. Up from the bosom of the lake rose an arm clothed in white samite in whose hand was clasped a sword and scabbard, and the hilt of that sword was ten times more beautiful and twinkled with far richer jewels than the weapon whose loss Arthur was mourning.

"How I wish it were mine," he whispered to Merlin tremulously.

"Hush," was the only reply, "Look toward the other side of the lake." Arthur obeyed, and saw gliding toward them what at first appeared to be a column of white mist not yet dispelled by the sun's rays, but which gradually resolved itself into the form of a beautiful maiden whose feet skimmed the waves as lightly as if they had been the floating petals of a pond lily.

"That," Merlin whispered, "is the Lady of the Lake. When she comes near ask her for the sword, for it is hers and belongs to her wonderful palace under the water."

Arthur then leaped from his horse, and stepping to the very brink of the waves, bowed low, saying:

"Fair Damsel, you see before you a knight who has been so unfortunate as to lose his sword. If you will give me yours I will promise you to do all in my power to make this land so safe that no maiden will ever after need to own a weapon, for there will be enough brave and chivalrous knights to fight the battles of all the weak and the oppressed."



"THE MIST RESOLVED ITSELF INTO A BEAUTIFUL MAIDEN"*
*Beata Beatrix, Rosetti, Tate [Courtesy Braun et Cie.]

“You may have the sword, King Arthur,” replied the Lady, “to do with as you have promised. Take the barge that you will find hidden in yonder rushes, and row out to claim it. It is yours to use for many years to come.”

Having said this the form of the maiden grew more and more mist-like and ethereal until finally Arthur’s wondering eyes could no longer distinguish the faintest trace of her. Then he and Merlin rowed out to the middle of the lake, and Arthur, almost fearing to see it vanish too, firmly grasped the sword, whereupon the arm clothed in white samite was immediately withdrawn, and the waters closed over it.

The moment that the weapon touched the young King’s hand, a strange thrill seemed to pass through his whole being and he felt within himself the strength of ten men. Curiously he drew it from its scabbard, and saw the blade flash in the sunlight so that he was almost blinded. Merlin, meanwhile, had been watching him with interest, and now he put a strange question to him:

“Which would you rather have,” said he, “the sword or the scabbard?”

Then Arthur, brave knight that he was, answered almost scornfully: “What a question, Merlin! The sword to be sure. It is the most wonderful thing I have ever seen. When I hold it in my hand I feel that no enemy could ever again prevail against me.”

“It is a wonderful weapon, indeed,” replied Merlin gravely. “The name of it is Excalibur, which is to say ‘Cut-Steel,’ and it is given to you whom men will call the White King that you may fight, not to win glory for yourself, but to right the wrongs of the weak and the oppressed as you have promised, and that you may drive the heathen from the land. Yes, it is a wonderful sword, but the scabbard is more wonderful still; for while it is in your possession you can never be killed in battle, and though you may be wounded your wounds will never bleed and you will lose no strength. Guard it well.”

They were silent for a while as Merlin rowed back to shore, and Arthur stood lost in thought examining his treasure.

“See,” said he at last, “on each side of the blade there is an inscription in a foreign tongue. Can you read them for me, Merlin?”

“The words are ancient Hebrew,” was the reply. “One side says ‘Take me’ and the other says ‘Cast me away.’”

“Then which ought I to do?” asked Arthur, puzzled.

“Take it and strike,” was the firm answer. “The time to cast it away will come, but it is still far distant. Yes, take the sword and strike with all your might.”

Now it happened that not long after his adventure Arthur had an opportunity of testing the powers of this wonderful Excalibur.

As he sat in his throne room one day in his castle at Camelot two messengers arrived and were ushered into his presence.

“We come,” said they, “from King Leodogran of Cameliard who pays tribute to you, as he paid it to your royal father Uther Pendragon. Our King is aged and his knights, too, are well advanced in years, so that they can no longer fight as in the days of old; and now our kingdom is threatened by one Rience, King of North Wales, for he has sent a message to our master saying that he has in preparation a mantle whose only trimming shall be the beards of kings. Eleven of these beards he has already, but he needs one more, and he insolently demands that our good Master send him his, otherwise he says he will come and take it, along with the head to which it belongs. Therefore have we come to you, O young White King of the noble heart and mighty arm, because you have made it known that you ever stand ready to render aid to the weak and the oppressed.”

At these words Arthur's heart leaped within him, so glad was he of this opportunity of using Excalibur in another's cause. Then he looked about among his knights and saw the fire of his own enthusiasm leap into the eyes of first one and then another. The next moment the whole room presented the appearance of a forest of glittering swords, for every weapon had been drawn from its scabbard and was being pointed upward as a sign that its owner was ready to follow his Liege Lord into battle, while a cry arose from all as from one man, “The quest, Sir King!”

In an incredibly short time the army was on the march northward through the deep snows, for it was winter; nevertheless, it so happened that, by Merlin's aid, it reached Cameliard even before the return of the messengers whom Leodogran had sent. Strangely unwearied by the journey, it arrived at the gate of the city one evening when the sun was sinking in the west, and found, as was but natural in time of war, that all was tightly closed.

“Ride straight on,” said Merlin, “as if there were no obstacle in your way, and you will find no difficulty.”

And so it was, for when Arthur's horse came abreast the gates swung wide, and the whole army passed through and started on its way to the castle where Leodogran was holding a council of war.

The young King's intentions were so good that he had scarcely realized what the effect of such an entrance into the town would be upon the people. Now, however, he saw them come trooping from their homes to stand in the streets, silent with amazement and pale with fear, while every roof was crowded with terrified women and children, even to the battlements of the palace itself where some of the ladies of the court, having heard a rumor of strange happenings, had climbed and were looking down upon the invading host.

It was at this moment that Arthur chanced to raise his eyes, and what he saw was a vision that never faded for him through all the days of his life. This was the face of a girl, the glory of whose golden hair was lighted by the setting sun, so that it appeared to the young man like the halo of a saint.

“Who is that, Merlin?” he asked breathlessly.

“That,” replied the Wise One whose gaze did not even have to follow Arthur's to learn of whom he spoke, “That is the Princess Guinevere, the only daughter of Leodogran and cherished by him as the apple of his eye.”

The young man said no more, but at that moment he made a mighty resolve to fight in the cause of the old King as he had never fought before; and he suddenly felt his arm strengthened as it had not been even by that first touch of Excalibur.

He, Merlin, and a few of the chief nobles now passed into the council chamber where the news of their sudden and mysterious arrival had created even more terror than their march through the streets. It was Arthur's plan to keep his identity a secret until after the battle, and this was an easy matter, for Leodogran could not imagine it possible that aid could have reached him from Camelot so soon; but it proved a harder matter to make the old King feel that he could trust these strangers. No one could ever look long into Arthur's face, however, without coming to believe in his truth and sincerity; so before the council closed it was arranged that Leodogran,

while awaiting the return of his messengers, should accept the help of these strange visitors.

The next morning, therefore, the two armies were on the march towards the plain just outside the city walls where Rience, himself a man twice the size of ordinary men, was encamped with his giant knights.

Merlin bore before his sovereign the mystic standard with the golden dragon that had belonged to Uther Pendragon, but which, now that it was Arthur's ensign, was beginning to show more wonderful qualities than ever; for, as the battle waxed hotter and hotter, it seemed that the dragon was spouting fire from his nostrils, so that the young King's position was easily distinguished by the anxious spectators on the city walls, and especially by the ladies on the battlements of the castle, among whom was the Princess Guinevere.

All day long the battle raged, but wherever Arthur appeared with the strange standard, the enemies, giants though they were, either fled terror stricken or fell lifeless under the mighty strokes of Excalibur, until gradually they were driven farther and farther from the walls, and it seemed that the victory was well-nigh in sight. Then a terrible thing happened.

Leodogran, exhausted by the struggle, but feeling secure in his young champion's strength, had withdrawn himself to a quieter part of the field. This, however, was the very opportunity for which Rience had been waiting. Leaving Arthur, therefore, still in the thick of the fight, he and a dozen or more of his knights wheeled their horses about and bore down upon the old King with the intention of dragging him off a prisoner. To the Princess from her point of vantage



"FIRE SPOUTED FROM THE DRAGON'S
NOSTRILS"*

*St. Michael

[Courtesy Braun et Cie.]

on the tower it seemed that her father was now lost indeed, and she had almost fainted in despair when she saw the young stranger stop fighting, disentangle himself from the fray, and speed across the plain. There he charged with such a mighty shock against the giants that were bearing Leodogran away that they dropped their prisoner and fled for their lives. A moment later the whole army of Rience was in confused retreat, with Arthur and his knights in pursuit.

Thus the day was won for King Leodogran; and that evening at the feast that was made for the victors, the beautiful Princess, to show her gratitude, served the valiant young stranger with her own fair hands, and thanked him simply and modestly for saving her father's life.

That night, if ever in his life, Arthur had expected to sleep soundly, but he found to his surprise that even the weariness of his body was not sufficient to overcome this strange new agitation of his heart. At dawn, therefore, he arose and sought the counsel of Merlin.

"Merlin," said he, trying to pretend that it was a matter of state that had been disturbing his rest. "My Lords have long advised me to take a wife. What have you to say on this subject?"

"Is there any damsel in particular that you have in mind?" asked the Wise Man, endeavoring to look very sober.

"Yes," said Arthur, "the Princess Guinevere is the fairest maiden in all the world, as any man with eyes can see. If I might win her for my bride I should be the happiest man on earth."

"And if I were to counsel you not to try to win her, would that make any difference?" asked Merlin quietly.

"Not the slightest," was the firm reply.

"Then, why are you asking my advice?" and the Wise One smiled.

"I do not ask it, Merlin," admitted Arthur. "This is a matter that I settle for myself; but I do beseech you to go to King Leodogran for me and ask for his daughter's hand."

"I may have to make your identity known," said Merlin.

"That you have my permission to do, if necessary," Arthur agreed.

A little later in the day, therefore, when King Leodogran and his ministers were assembled in the throne room, Merlin came before them and made a formal request for the hand of the Princess in the name

of his young master. When he had finished speaking a deep silence fell upon the room. Presently the old King began to speak:

“Your master,” said he, “is a brave knight and a valiant gentleman. Into the care of such a one would I gladly give the Jewel of my court. Moreover, my debt of gratitude to him is greater than I can ever repay. And yet—and yet—”

“And yet what?” inquired Merlin.

“My child is the daughter of a long line of kings, therefore it is not fitting that I should bestow her hand upon one whose rank is not equal to her own; and yet—and yet—”

Then the Wise Man smiled.

“Have you any idea, my Lord,” said he, “who the young knight is who fought so valiantly in your cause?”

“No,” replied Leodogran, “he seemed unwilling to tell me, so by the laws of courtesy I was bound to ask no questions.”

“Then, Sir King, let me inform you,” and Merlin’s voice rang out clear and strong, “that he is Arthur himself, your Liege Lord, who by my aid was able to reach you even before the return of your own messengers.”

“And you are Merlin!” cried the old King in joy. “You are welcome at my court, O Wise Man, as welcome as the news that you bring me; for, what greater happiness could come to me in my old age than that Arthur, the son of my friend and overlord Uther Pendragon, should seek my daughter in marriage. You and he are welcome, indeed!”

The following day, therefore, when Arthur and his army set out on their homeward journey, he and the Princess were already betrothed; and it was all arranged that, when the winter snows had melted, making it fit for her to travel, he would send for her that they might be married in his own capital city of Camelot.

So Arthur returned to his own land and fought many a brave battle with his strong arm and Excalibur, while he waited impatiently for the first signs of spring. At last, however, the sun began to take on a new warmth, the snow gradually disappeared from hillside and plain, and a tender emerald haze silently enveloped the landscape. Then Arthur called to his side a young knight lately come to his court—Launcelot of the Lake by name—between whom and the King there

existed the tenderest bond of friendship based upon mutual admiration.

“Launcelot,” said he, “I am a king, the servant of my people; therefore, I cannot as other men leave my post of duty to seek my bride. Go, then, for me, my most trusted friend; take Merlin with you lest you should need his aid, and bring me the beautiful Princess Guinevere.”

So the embassy set out through the soft April green, and returned when the woods were white with May. Southward toward the city of Camelot at Launcelot’s side rode Guinevere, the Flower-of-the-May, seated on a cream-white mule, and wearing a gown of grass-green silk fastened with a golden clasp.

When they neared the mystic city upon whose gates Arthur’s wars were prophetically rendered, the young King himself rode out to meet his bride; and the next day they were married in the church at Camelot, the holy Archbishop himself pronouncing the words that bound them together for life.

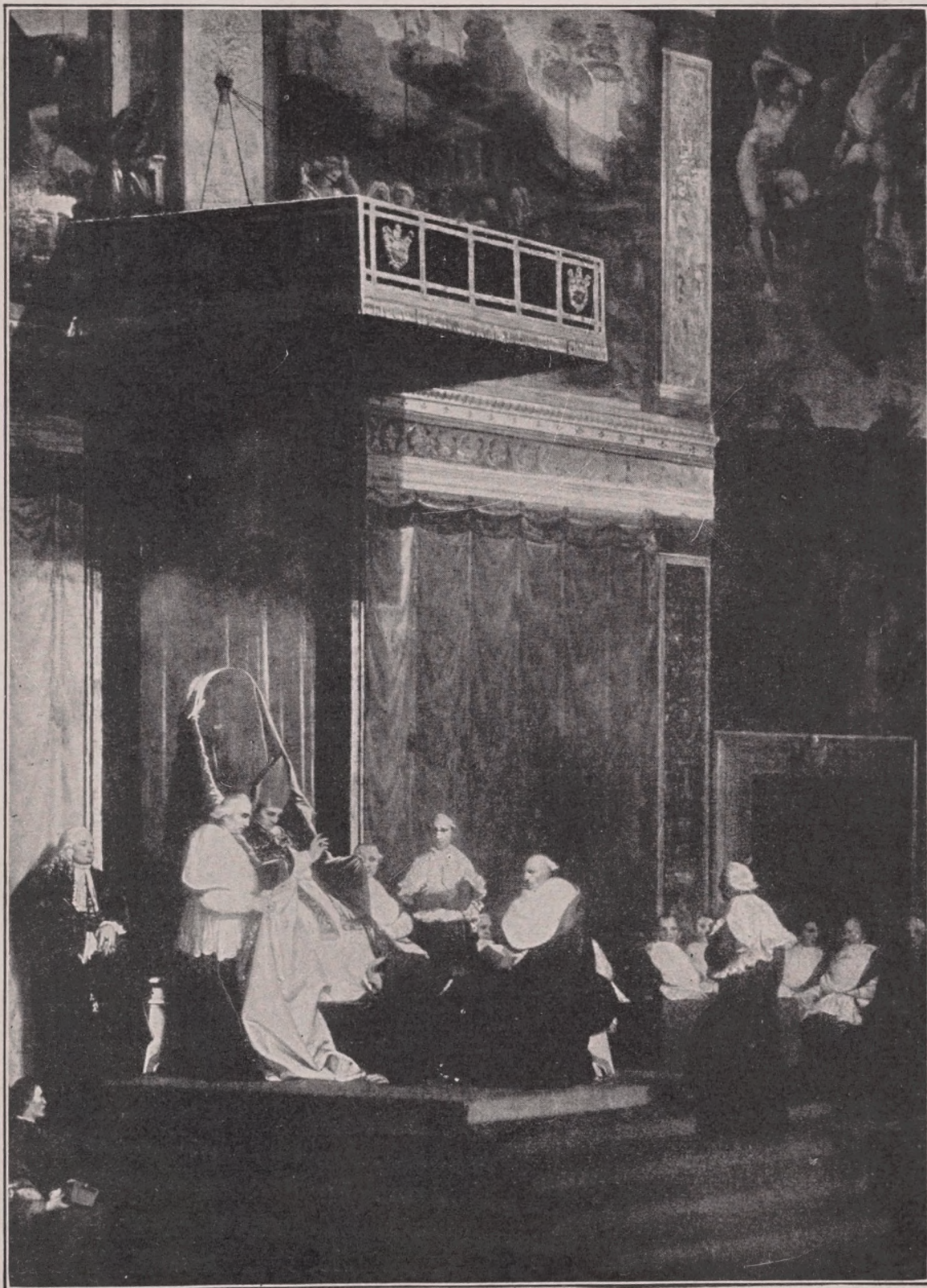
As they turned from the altar and passed homeward through the streets of the city which the little children had strewn with flowers they were met by a band of white-garbed knights who blew upon golden trumpets and joyfully sang:

“Blow trumpet, for the world is white with May!
Blow trumpet, the long night hath roll’d away!
Blow through the living world—“Let the King reign!”

“Shall Rome or Heathen rule in Arthur’s realm?
Flash brand and lance, fall battle-ax on helm,
Fall battle-ax, and flash brand! Let the King reign!

“Strike for the King and live! His knights have heard
That God hath told the King a secret word.
Fall battle-ax, and flash brand! Let the King reign!

“Blow trumpet! he will lift us from the dust.
Blow trumpet! live the strength and die the lust!
Clang battle-ax, and clash brand! Let the King reign!



THE ARCHBISHOP

[Courtesy Braun et Cie.]

“Strike for the King and die! and if thou diest,
The King is king, and ever wills the highest.
Clang battle-ax, and clash brand! Let the King reign!

“Blow, for our Sun is mighty in his May!
Blow, for our Sun is mightier day by day!
Clang battle-ax, and clash brand! Let the King reign!

“The King will follow Christ, and we the King,
In whom high God hath breathed a secret thing.
Fall battle-ax, and flash brand! Let the King reign!”

Such were the glories of Arthur's wedding day. Yet, these were not all. There remained yet a greater wonder. As the young King with his bride entered the chamber where the banquet was spread, a strange sight met his eyes: In the centre of the room stood an immense round table of rare workmanship.

“What is that, Merlin?” he inquired surprised, “and why is it here?”

“That,” replied the Wise Man, “is a mystic table that I myself made many years ago for your father, Uther Pendragon. It comes to you now as a wedding gift from King Leodogran, in whose keeping it has been since Uther's death. About it, as you see, are places for a hundred and fifty knights. Your father-in-law, as part of his gift, has sent you one hundred. The other fifty seats, or sieges, you are to fill yourself with young men of your own age as they prove themselves worthy. But remember, that none must ever take his place until his name appears of its own accord upon the siege that he is to occupy.”

An awed hush fell upon the company, while each man present was secretly wondering if he would be among the chosen ones. Then the Archbishop stepped forward and raised his arms over the table in blessing. As his words died away a strange thing happened: Upon one siege after another, as if a mysterious flame were leaping from place to place, golden letters spelling the names of knights began to appear until there were but twenty-two unclaimed places. In reverent silence the men thus called took their seats, and while they yet waited, one more siege began to glow with the mysterious writing. This time, however, instead of a name there appeared these words:

“THIS IS THE SIEGE PERILOUS IN WHICH NO MAN MAY SIT UNTIL THE COMING OF THE BEST KNIGHT IN ALL THE WORLD.”

Then Arthur, reading this inscription, turned to Merlin in surprise.

“Surely,” said he, “this is the place of Launcelot, for where could we ever find a knight that is better than he?”

But the Wise Man shook his head sadly, saying:

“Let him never dare to take that place lest he be consumed by fire from heaven. The knight who is to sit there will surely come some day, but that time is still far distant. With these knights you must now found the **ORDER OF THE ROUND TABLE**, whose members are to be mystically chosen from among the flower of men, and whose vows shall be the noblest that ever knights took upon them.”

Then each of the chosen ones came forward, and kneeling before the throne where Arthur sat with his beautiful young queen beside him, laid his hand in his sovereign's and took the vow of the Order:

“To reverence the King as if he were
 Their conscience, and their conscience as their King,
 To break the heathen and uphold the Christ,
 To ride abroad redressing human wrongs,
 To speak no slander, no, nor listen to it,
 To honor his own word as if his God's,

 To lead sweet lives in purest chastity,
 To love one maiden only, cleave to her,
 And worship her by years of noble deeds,
 Until they won her.”

So the sun went down in golden glory upon Arthur's wedding day.

GLOSSARY 1

1. *Barge*, a boat. 2. *Chivalric*, like an ideal knight. 3. *Chivalrous*, gallant, brave. 4. *Damsel*, a young girl. 5. *Ensign*, a flag or banner. 6. *Ethereal*, like air. 7. *Hermit*, one who lived in solitude for religious worship. 8. *Hermitage*, the home of a hermit. 9. *Hilt*, the handle and guard of a sword. 10. *Jousting*, tilting between two knights. 11. *Liege Lord*, a chief who held authority over other lords. 12. *Overlord*, same as liege lord. 13. *Samite*, a cloth like satin with glistening threads of silver and gold. 14. *Scabbard*, the sheath of a sword. 15. *Standard*, a flag or banner. 16. *Tribute*, money, or some other thing of value, paid as acknowledgment of submission.

IV

Gareth the Kitchen Knave

“And Gareth said,
‘Full pardon, but I follow up the quest,
Despite of Day and Night and Death and Hell.’”
TENNYSON’S “Gareth and Lynette.”

“**M**OTHER, when will you let me go to King Arthur’s court?”
Queen Bellicent, the wife of King Lot of Orkney, raised her troubled eyes to meet the pleading gaze of her youngest son, Gareth.

“O Gareth, Gareth,” she replied in a voice from which tears were not far distant, “you are still a child; and have you no pity for my loneliness? Both your brothers are in Arthur’s halls, unless one, or both, of them is at this very moment lying dead pierced by a dozen wounds. You do not know what it means to be a knight and daily risk your life in brain-stunning shocks and tourney-falls.”

“Ah! Mother, Mother,” cried the young man with kindling eyes, “it is for that very reason that I long to go!”

“No, no, my son,” and Bellicent shook her head sadly, “stay a while longer. Follow the deer in your own father’s forests, and so make your manhood mightier day by day.”

“Follow the deer! Mother, I must follow the Christ and the King, or else why was I born? Mother, what can I do to prove to you that I am no longer a child but a man, ready to take a man’s part in life?”

“Do? Well, what would you do to prove it—you who have never felt a finger-ache or a pain?”

“Do? Ah! Mother, I would walk through fire.”

“You would walk through fire, you say?” and Bellicent smiled a strange smile. “In that case you surely would not mind a little smoke?”

“A little smoke? Ah! surely not, Mother,” exclaimed the boy in surprise.

“Then I will let you go—”

“Truly, Mother?”



“FOLLOW THE DEER”*

*Deer in Forest, Courbet

[*Courtesy Braun et Cie.*]

“On one condition—”

“Yes, anything, anything, only—”

“Then listen carefully,” said Queen Bellicent slowly. “You may go if you will go disguised, and hire yourself out to serve meats and drinks for a year and a day among Arthur’s scullions and kitchen knaves.”

Having said this, the Queen smiled to herself, for she believed

that her princely son was far too proud to submit himself to so humiliating a test.

The boy was silent for a while, then he replied gravely:

“Even though my body were in bondage, Mother, I should still be free in soul; and I should see the jousts and hear the talk of the brave knights, and see the face of the King now and then. Yes, Mother, I will do as you say.”

Then Bellicent realized that her son was in earnest indeed, and she made no more attempt to prevent his going.

One morning a few days later, therefore, while the anxious mother was still asleep, Gareth quietly arose, and taking with him two faithful serving men who had waited on him since his birth, set out for Camelot.

The three, dressed like tillers of the soil, journeyed southward for two days until one fair morning they saw the spires and turrets of the mystic city pricking through the mist. Presently they came to the wonderful gate upon whose keystone stood an image of the Lady of the Lake who had given Excalibur to Arthur. Her garments seemed to be sweeping from her sides like water flowing away, and in the space to left and right of her the young King's wars were shown in weird devices.

Gareth and his companions stood staring at this curious gate so long that at last it seemed to them that the pictured dragons upon it began to move and seethe and twine and curl as if the whole portal were alive, while from within came a sound of weird music, so that the two serving-men would gladly have turned back fearing enchantment, but Gareth pressed right on until he stood in the long vaulted hall of the royal palace itself where the King sat upon his throne delivering judgment.

While Gareth waited he saw one person after another having a complaint to make or a boon to ask brought before Arthur, who, after listening carefully to the story, would assign the righting of the wrong—if such he deemed it to be—to one of the tall knights that ranged themselves about his throne; so that every now and then one of these would ride away upon his appointed quest.

At last it came Gareth's turn to make his plea. Stepping forward, therefore, leaning upon the shoulders of his two servitors as if needing support, he approached and said: “A boon, Sir King!”

Then as Arthur bent forward graciously to listen:

“Grant that I may serve among your kitchen knaves for a year and a day. Then, having grown strong with meats and drinks from your table, I shall be able to fight.”

The King looked at the boy in surprise, for neither his face nor his stalwart young body showed any signs of weakness or starvation. Presently he said:

“You appear to be a goodly youth, and worth a goodlier boon. Still, as this is what you ask, let it be so. I therefore hand you over to the care of my Seneschal, Sir Kay.”

Gareth turned and looked into the eyes of the man who was henceforth to be his master, and certainly the sight was not at all reassuring, for Kay was the surliest and most unpleasant looking of all the knights at Arthur’s court.

“Humph!” he now said crossly. “A good-for-nothing fellow, no doubt, who has run away from some abbey where he was too lazy to earn his food. But he shall work now. I’ll see to that, never fear!”

It chanced, however, that Launcelot, the most illustrious of all the knights, and Arthur’s dearest friend, was standing by and overheard Kay’s remark.

“Kay, Kay,” he said, after having taken a good look at the lad. “You may know a great deal about dogs and horses, but not much, I fear, about men. I advise you to treat that boy kindly, for if he is not noble natured I am much mistaken, and you may some day discover that he is also of noble blood.”

“Tut,” replied Kay scornfully. “If he were noble would he not have asked the King for horse and armor instead of food and drink. Yes, I see that his brow is smooth and his hand white, but I will soon alter that when I get him among the pots and pans.” Then turning to Gareth:

“Come along, Sir Fair-hands. Come along with me.”

So Gareth passed with Sir Kay from the bright glory of Arthur’s hall down into the smut and grime of the kitchens where he submitted day after day to being hustled and harried by a master who had no love for him. Thus the first long month of his servitude wore away, then one day when the lad was scrubbing away as usual at his pots and pans, seeing how brilliantly he could make them shine, and pre-

tending to himself that he was burnishing his armor, Sir Kay strode into the room and said gruffly:

“Ho, ho, Sir Fair-hands, we shall see what is about to happen to you now! The King himself has sent for you, doubtless to reprimand you for some villainy which you have succeeded in concealing even from me. Go along at once.”

Now, though Gareth's conscience was clear, he could not help being seriously disturbed by this unexpected summons; when, therefore, having hastily washed off the grime and made himself as presentable as possible, he found himself once again in the presence of the great King, he was much surprised to read in Arthur's smiling countenance no sign of anger or disapproval.

“Gareth,” said he when the two were alone. “I know your secret. Your mother has repented of the hard promise she made you give. She has, therefore, sent me a message explaining all and releasing you. A man is sometimes knighted, Gareth, on the field of battle for some deed of special bravery. I am about to knight you now, my boy, for the same reason.”

“But, my Lord,” cried Gareth in astonishment, “I have as yet done no brave deed!”

“That is a question of which I will be the judge,” replied Arthur gravely. “A man on the battlefield or in the tourney has the encouragement of the plaudits of his fellows, and is spurred on by excitement and the hope of winning glory, but you have toiled nobly in humiliation and obscurity. Therefore kneel, Gareth, and receive the order of knighthood.”

At those words of praise from the lips of him whom the lad honored as he honored no other human being, Gareth's eyes filled with tears and he knelt humbly to take those vows “as is a shame a man should not be bound by, yet the which no man can keep”; then the King gave him three strokes with the flat of his sword, and Gareth arose—a kitchen knave no longer.

“Now,” said Arthur, still smiling, “is there another boon that I can grant you, SIR Gareth?”

The lad pondered for a while, then he said:

“I am now a knight, Sir King, but I am not yet proven. Grant therefore that I may wear my disguise a while longer, and give me the next quest. So shall I spring like flame from ashes.”

"I will grant that boon," replied the King gravely, "on condition that my friend Sir Launcelot may share the secret."

To this Gareth agreed readily enough; so he returned to the kitchen to await impatiently the King's next audience day. And he had not long to wait, for Arthur held himself ready whenever possible to hear the complaints of his subjects.

It happened, therefore, one fine morning in early summer, that a maiden of haughty bearing and high lineage passed into Arthur's hall, and, scarcely waiting to do obeisance, burst out with her grievance:

"Sir King, you have truly driven the heathen from the land as you promised, but bandits and robbers still infest many a bridge and ford. If I were king I should not rest until the loneliest spot in the realm were as free from bloodshed as your altar cloth."

"Fair maiden," replied the King, courteously ignoring her lack of courtesy, "rest assured that I and my knights will never lay aside our arms while there is one lonely moorland that is not as safe as the centre of this hall. Pray tell us your name and your particular need."

"My name," said the damsel proudly, "is Lynette; my need is a knight to do battle for my sister, the Lady Lyoners, who lives in Castle Perilous about which a broad river winds in three loops. Spanning these loops are three bridges guarded by three bandit knights, while a fourth, the most terrible of all, keeps her a prisoner in her own castle, and besieges her there, endeavoring to break her will and force her to wed him. Therefore have I come to you, Sir King, for your very best knight, who is Sir Launcelot as everyone knows. Send us no other, I pray you, for already fifty of your knights have given their lives in this cause, as their shields testify, for they hang as trophies about the black tent of that fourth knight whose face no man has ever seen and whose voice no man has ever heard."

When she had finished speaking there was silence in the hall save for the clinking sound of weapons about to be withdrawn from their scabbards. Then in another moment every sword in the room was being pointed forward and upward, while the cry rang through the whole castle:

"The quest, Sir King!"

For the instant Arthur, so absorbed had he been in the maiden's story, had forgotten Gareth and the promise he had made him. He

was smiling now as he paused before assigning the adventure to Launcelot to look down upon that forest of swords which spoke to him so eloquently of the valor of his knights. Suddenly his eye fell upon something that was truly an amazing sight: This was a great iron spit raised as high as any sword by the begrimed hand of one of the kitchen knaves. Then the King remembered!

His face first flushed and then paled, for he knew that Gareth, though of royal blood, was nevertheless but a boy as yet unproved, and he knew, too, that this was a quest in which many a full-grown man had failed. Yet he had given his word, and the word of a King may not be broken; therefore, turning to the poorly clad scullion, he bent his head, saying:

“Sir Fair-hands, the quest is yours.”

Up to that moment, in the general excitement, none of the knights had noticed the entrance of this intruder in their midst. Now, however, every eye in the room was turned upon the spot where poor Gareth stood with his spit still in his hand.

It was a rule at Arthur's court that there should be no murmuring when a quest was assigned. But never before had the self-control of the knights been put to such a test as this. For a while there was a dead silence which was broken presently by Sir Kay, who could not repress a deep grunt. Then the maiden, having at last realized what had happened, burst forth:

“Shame on you, Sir King, and shame forever on your boasted Order of the Round Table! I, a maiden of gentle birth, have asked you for your best knight, and you have given me your kitchen knave!—Your kitchen knave!”

Then before anyone could stop her, she turned her back on the King, fled from the room, and was on her horse and away.

Gareth, however, had no idea of losing his opportunity. Loosening a string, therefore, he allowed his kitchen garb to fall off, revealing the fact, to the amazement of all present, that he was clothed underneath in a full suit of glittering, jewelled armor. Then, throwing aside his spit, he seized spear and shield, gifts from the King, and leaping upon a war horse, another gift, was after the fleeing maiden before the spectators had had time to recover from their surprise.

Just beyond the gates of the city he overtook her, and saw to

his dismay, that despite his transformation, the flush of anger deepened in her cheeks at sight of him. Nevertheless, he addressed her most courteously.

“Fair Damsel,” said he, “the quest is mine. Ride and I follow.”

At this the maiden drew herself to her full height and answered, while her black eyes flashed scorn upon her would-be champion:

“Sir Scullion, I have but one request to make of you, and that is that you leave me this instant. Far rather would I fall a prey to bandits or wild beasts than be protected by such as you. Leave me, I pray you, for you smell of the kitchen.”

“Damsel,” replied Gareth still as courteously as ever, “say what you please to me, but whatever you say, rest assured I will never leave you till I achieve the quest, or die in the attempt. Ride and I follow.”

Upon hearing this, without another word the maiden spurred her palfrey in a vain attempt to outdistance her protector, and so they rode through deep woods until the shades of night overtook them, and they were obliged to seek shelter at a neighboring castle.

The next morning, however, the two were early on their way once more, and Gareth had begun to think that the fair Lynette would never deign to speak to him again, when suddenly she reined her horse, thus allowing him to come up with her, and said:

“Sir Scullion, we shall soon reach the first loop of the river which is guarded, as I told the King, by a bandit knight. He calls himself Morning Star, and I advise you to turn back; for no kitchen knave could ever hope to do battle successfully with such as he.”

“Madam,” said Gareth firmly, “as I have told you before, this quest is mine. I pray you, ride on and I follow.”

She said no more, but scornfully obeyed his command, and it was not long before they came to a bridge which spanned a narrow but deep stream. On the farther side Gareth beheld a silk pavilion, gay with golden streaks and rays of the Lent-lily, except where the dome rose high and purple. From the top there floated a crimson banner, and beneath, an unarmed warrior was pacing to and fro.

At sight of the maiden's champion, this knight gave a strange call, whereupon three beautiful, silken-clad maidens, the Daughters of the Dawn, whose golden tresses were begemmed with drops of morning dew, came forward and clad the warrior in light blue armor and placed in his hand a blue shield in the centre of which shone a morning star.

Then the knight leaped upon his horse, and with fiery speed he and Gareth shocked together in the centre of the bridge so that both their spears were bent, then each hurled a stone from his catapult, after which, Gareth recovering himself lashed so fiercely with his brand that he drove his enemy backward down the bridge until his own shield was broken—but the Morning Star lay grovelling at his feet.

“Spare my life, Sir Knight, I yield!” the great warrior was now crying.

“I will spare it,” replied Gareth, “on condition that this maiden asks me to do so.”

“Insolent scullion,” cried the damsel, flushing, “must I stoop so low as to ask a favor of you? I will not.”

“Then shall he die,” said Gareth quietly.

“Stop, rascal,” cried Lynette as Gareth began to unlace the warrior’s helmet, “it would be a shame for me to allow a knight to be slain by a kitchen knave. Therefore I ask you, Sir Scullion, to spare his life.”

“Rise then,” said Gareth to his fallen enemy, “but give me your shield in place of my broken one, and ride to Arthur’s hall and there tell the King that his kitchen knave has achieved one-fourth part of his quest.” Then to the maiden he said, “Ride, Damsel, and I follow.”

On they went, those two strange companions, reviler and reviled, while the sun gradually rose higher in the heavens, and the heat grew more and more oppressive. Toward noon Lynette slowed her palfrey once again and turning to her champion said:

“Sir Knave, by some evil chance you have managed to overcome a knight. Think not, however, that you will be able to stand against him whom you are now about to encounter. He calls himself Noonday Sun, and his strength as far exceeds that of his brother, Morning Star, as the light of the sun at noon exceeds that of the star that fades in the blue of dawn. I warn you for the second time to flee.”

But Gareth’s only answer was:

“Maiden, the quest is mine. Ride and I follow.”

Within a few more moments they had reached the second bend of the river, where they beheld sitting astride a huge red horse the terrible Noonday Sun. This man’s armor and shield were so brightly burnished that they seemed to cast off sparks so that Gareth was nearly blinded by their splendor. At sight of the boy this mighty

warrior gave an angry cry and plunged into the foaming stream, where Gareth met him half way. Four mighty strokes they gave each other with their swords, then because there was no room in the whirling waters for any tourney skill, Gareth feared that he would be overcome and put to shame before the maiden. Just then, however, the knight raised his ponderous arm for a fifth stroke, whereupon his horse slipped in the stream, and the waters extinguished the light of the Noonday Sun.

Gareth, however, was too true a knight to take such an advantage of his enemy. He put his lance across the ford, therefore, and with great difficulty managed to bring him to shore. But the warrior was no longer willing to continue the contest; so Gareth spared his life at the request of the maiden upon the condition that he ride to Arthur's court and inform the King that one-half of the kitchen knave's quest was now achieved.

Then the two rode on once more through the long hours of the sultry afternoon. Toward evening the maiden reined her horse again and began to speak in a voice that seemed to Gareth just a trifle less scornful.

"Sir Scullion," said she, "for a kitchen knave you have truly done well. Nevertheless, if the Noonday Sun's horse had not slipped you certainly would not have been the victor. Therefore I advise you to leave this quest, for the man that you are now to meet as an opponent is an old and seasoned warrior, who calls himself Evening Star. You will have little chance to stand against him, I assure you. Be wise and flee for your life while there is yet time."

"Maiden," said Gareth as courteously as ever, "the quest is mine. Ride and I follow."

So they rode and presently reached the third loop of the river, which was spanned by a bridge of treble bow. Beyond this bridge, outlined against the rose-red of the western sky, stood a huge figure wrapped in hardened skins that fit him like his own.

"See," whispered the maiden in a frightened voice, "if you should succeed in cleaving his armor, those skins would turn the blade of your sword. O Gareth, Gareth, be careful!"

At that new tone the lad's heart leaped within him for joy, but he had not long to consider its meaning, for the Evening Star was now calling to him from the bridge:

“O brother-star, why do you shine here so low? Your ward is higher up. But tell me, have you slain the maiden’s champion?”

Then the damsel saw that he was mistaking Gareth for his brother because he bore the Morning Star’s shield, and cried out to him:

“No star of yours, but shot from Arthur’s heaven with all disaster to you and yours! Both your younger brothers have gone down before this youth; and so will you, Sir Star; are you not old?”

“Yes, old,” laughed the knight, “both old and hard, with the might and breath of twenty such boys.”

Then he blew a fierce blast on his horn, whereat, from out a storm-beaten and many-stained pavilion came a grizzled old woman who armed him in battered arms and brought him a helm with a drying evergreen for a crest and a shield whose emblem was a half-tarnished evening star. Thus equipped, he leaped upon his horse, and he and Gareth hurled madly together on the bridge.

Three times in that terrible struggle the lad threw his opponent, and three times he saw him rise again as strong as ever until Gareth was panting hard, and his heart, fearing that he would now be overcome, labored within him. Just at this moment, however, above the din of clashing arms, he heard the voice of Lynette.

“Well done, brave knight!” she was crying. “Oh knave as noble as any knight, shame me not! Oh good knight-knave, strike! You are worthy of the Round Table! His arms are old; he trusts his hardened skin. Strike! Strike!”

Then Gareth, encouraged by this unexpected praise, smote with such might that he hewed off great pieces of his enemy’s armor and at last succeeded in hurling him headlong over the bridge. Panting still, he turned to the maiden, saying:

“Three-fourths of my quest is now achieved, Fair Damsel; ride and I follow.”

But Lynette answered very, very gently:

“I lead no longer. You are the kingliest of all kitchen knaves. Ride at my side, I pray you.”

So the two rode side by side as the long summer twilight deepened about them. After a while the maiden spoke again, and all her former haughtiness had left her so that her voice was sweet and shy:

“Sir,” she murmured, “Sir—whom I would now call knight if I

had not heard you call yourself a knave—I am ashamed to have treated you so discourteously. I am of noble birth, and I thought the King scorned me and mine when he assigned the quest to you. But now I humbly ask your pardon, for I know that whatever may be your rank, you have a princely heart.”

“Damsel,” said Gareth gently, “you are not all to blame, except for mistrusting our good King. Know then that I am no kitchen knave but the son of King Lot and Queen Bellicent of Orkney, and if I had any but a princely heart I should shame my birth.”

Then they rode again for a long time in silence. After a while Lynette spoke one more:

“Sir Prince, I feel that the time has come when I must warn you; but do not, I pray you, think that I speak any longer in scorn. You have fought valiantly. I doubt if Launcelot himself could have performed greater feats. But now I plead with you to turn back. You are wounded I know, although you have not told me. Wonders you have done, miracles you cannot do. This knight who guards the castle is not a man but a monster who calls himself Night or Death. No mortal has ever seen his face uncovered, or heard his voice, and his appearance is too terrible for me to describe. I beg of you to turn back and leave the achieving of this part of the quest to Launcelot, whom the Dreadful One challenged.”

But Gareth only shook his head, and rode on saying:

“This quest is mine, Fair Damsel, in spite of Day and Night and Death himself.”

And now heavy clouds began to gather hiding the friendly stars from their gaze, while the air took on a strange, midnight chill. Presently Lynette leaned toward Gareth and whispered in an awed voice:

“There!”

And through the gloom Gareth perceived, standing beside what he guessed to be Castle Perilous, a huge black pavilion with a black banner trailing from its peak. In an instant, before Lynette could prevent him he had seized a long, black horn that hung near by, and blown a blast that sent a ghostly echo through the night. Then he waited, but there was no response, save from the castle windows where lights began to twinkle and pale faces were seen peering out. Again he blew—and a third time. Then, at last, the great black doors of the pavilion were slowly drawn aside and there issued forth

a hideous figure in coal-black armor, seated upon a huge black horse, and bearing a black shield whose emblem was a white breast-bone, barren ribs, and a grinning skull. Through the dim light this frightful apparition advanced, then paused, speaking never a word.

And now Gareth really believed that his last hour had come, for all things seemed to be enveloped in a cloud of nameless horror. Suddenly the great black war-horse gave an unexpected plunge forward, and those that had not closed their eyes in terror, saw Death reel in the saddle, and drop to the ground with a mighty crash. In an instant Gareth had leaped from his own horse, and with two mighty strokes managed to split open his enemy's armor. Then—out peeped the bright face of a blooming boy!

Before Gareth could recover from his astonishment, the child was kneeling before him and pleading:

“Do not slay me, Sir Knight, I beg of you! My brothers, Morning Star, Noonday Sun, and Evening Star made me dress up in this way to frighten other knights away from the Lady Lyoners.”

“But, my child” asked Gareth kindly, “what madness made you challenge Launcelot, the chief knight of Arthur's Round Table?”

“Fair Sir, they made me do that too,” the boy replied, “for they hated Launcelot, and hoped to slay him somewhere on the stream. They never dreamed that he could pass all three bridges.”

Then Gareth gently raised the lad, bidding him have no fear, and the two followed Lynette into the castle where the Lady Lyoners stood waiting to welcome them, and where she speedily made ready a great feast in honor of Gareth and the overthrow of Death.

Now some say that Prince Gareth married the Lady Lyoners, while others say that he married Lynette, but however that may be, when he rode back to Arthur's hall with his bride, he found that one of the sieges of the mystic Round Table glowed with the letters of his name.

GLOSSARY 2

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|--------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------|---|--|------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|--|
| 1. <i>Boon</i> , a gift. | 2. <i>Brand</i> , a sword. | 3. <i>Bur-nish</i> , to polish. | 4. <i>Catapult</i> , a military engine. | 5. <i>Champion</i> , one who fights for another. | 6. <i>Cleave</i> , to split. | 7. <i>Device</i> , <i>Emblem</i> , a picture used as the badge of a person or family. | 8. <i>Knave</i> , a male servant. | 9. <i>Lent-Lilly</i> , a daffo- | dil. | 10. <i>Lineage</i> , family. | 11. <i>Obeisance</i> , a bow. | 12. <i>Palfrey</i> , a woman's saddle-horse. | 13. <i>Pa-vilion</i> , a tent. | 14. <i>Plaudot</i> , applause. | 15. <i>Quest</i> , a search. | 16. <i>Scullion</i> , a servant. | 17. <i>Seneschal</i> , a steward. | 18. <i>Siege</i> , a seat. | 19. <i>Spit</i> , a pointed bar upon which meat was roasted. |
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Geraint with the Sparrow-Hawk

“The brave Geraint, a knight of Arthur’s court,
A tributary prince of Devon, one
Of that great order of the Table Round,
Had married Enid, Yniol’s only child,
And loved her, as he loved the light of Heaven.”

TENNYSON’S “Geraint and Enid.”

IN the days when the Round Table was at the height of its glory, it was Arthur’s custom to hold his court at Caerleon-Upon-Usk once a year at the Feast of Pentecost, which, it will be remembered, was likewise his birthday and the anniversary of his coronation. And it was also his rule never to sit down to the banquet that was then spread until he and his knights had either seen, or heard of, some unusual thing.

On this particular day, therefore, the King and the Queen and all the noblemen and ladies of the court were assembled in the high hall of the castle awaiting the report of some strange adventure, and feeling sure, such were the exciting times in which they lived, that it would be forthcoming in some shape or form before very long. Suddenly there appeared in their midst Arthur’s chief forester, still wet from the woods, bearing the news that a white hart had been seen in the forest.

Now a white hart was then, and is still, an unusual sight; and the report of its appearance was considered by all to be sufficiently peculiar to permit the feast to begin. Naturally, therefore, the conversation as the guests passed into the banquet hall was about this wonderful animal.

“Ah! how beautiful it must be, and how I should like to possess its head!” exclaimed one of the Queen’s maidens; and her wish was echoed by first one and then another of her companions.

Hearing this, the gallant knights were immediately on the alert.

"Since the ladies desire this head," they cried enthusiastically, turning toward their King, "why may we not procure it for them?"

At this Arthur smiled, and gave the order for the horns to be blown announcing a hunt for the following day.

"And he who slays the hart," said he, "shall have the head with the privilege of bestowing it upon the lady whom he loves best in all the world."

To this plan they were all ready enough to agree until one of the younger knights of their number, Geraint by name, a tributary prince of Devon, arose in his place and thus addressed his sovereign:

"Sir King, for those of us whose hearts have already found a harbor in some gentle maiden's breast, the plan is a good one; but in case the prize should be won by such a knight as I, who am still heart-whole and heart-free—what then?"

Then Arthur pondered for a moment, but before he could come to any decision, Launcelot arose and in his turn addressed the King:

"Your Majesty," said he, "I suggest that, in such a case, the fortunate one bestow the head upon the flower of your court—Queen Guinevere."

At this there was great applause, which only subsided when the beautiful Queen herself arose to speak.

"My Lords," said she, "let it then be understood by all that, should this prize fall to my lot, I will keep it in safety and make it a wedding gift to the first bride that one of your number shall bring to our court."

Thereupon the room rang again with the clapping of hands, and the matter was so arranged.

Now the Queen had asked as a favor that she and her ladies be allowed to see this hunt; but when, with the first signs of dawn, the eager knights were up and away, Guinevere was still lost in sweet dreams. At last, however, she arose, and in company with a single maiden, took horse and crossed the river. Presently they reached the wood, and there, drawing rein, waited upon a tiny knoll listening for the baying of the hounds.

Instead of that, however, the first sound that greeted their ear was that of a galloping horse's hoofs, for Geraint had also overslept,

and was now making his tardy appearance wearing neither hunting-dress nor weapon, except a golden-hilted sword.

Upon seeing the Queen, he immediately rode forward and bowed low, which act of courtesy she returned with stately grace. Then she laughed and said:

“Fie, Prince, you are late, later than we!”

“Yes, noble Queen,” replied Geraint, “so late, in fact, that I have, as you see, left arms and hunting garb at home, and am come, like you, to see the hunt, not to join it.”

“For shame, Sir Knight!” said the Queen, still laughing. “One sees plainly by your conduct that you are still free in heart, otherwise you would have taken more interest in this prize which all the maidens so desire.”

Geraint was about to make some chivalrous reply when the conversation was interrupted by the sudden appearance around a bend in the road of a knight riding with his visor up, and thus revealing a youthful but extremely haughty countenance. At his side rode a lady, and behind the two lagged a little black dwarf.

Now it occurred to Guinevere that she had never seen the man's face in Arthur's hall, and immediately she became curious to learn who he might be. Turning to her maiden, therefore, she said:

“Go, I pray you, and ask that dwarf his master's name.”

But the little creature, in spite of the smallness of his stature, was old and vicious and irritable, and answered with scant courtesy that he would give the damsel no information, whereupon the quick color came into her cheeks, and she replied hotly:

“Then I will ask your master himself.”

“No, by my faith you shall not,” cried the ugly little fellow. “You are not worthy to speak to such a one as he!” And with that he struck at her with his whip, so that she returned indignant to the Queen.

At this Geraint, even more indignant than the maiden herself, spurred his horse, exclaiming sharply:

“Surely I will learn the name.”

But prince though he was, he fared no better at the hands of the impudent little creature, who struck at him also with his whip, cutting his cheek until the blood spurted forth. In an instant Geraint had instinctively caught at the hilt of his sword; then he remembered the

honor of his knighthood, which would not permit him to fight with one smaller or weaker than himself. So he returned to the Queen and said:

“Your Majesty, rest assured that I will avenge this insult done in your maiden’s person to yourself. At this moment I cannot do



“THE RUINS OF WHAT HAD ONCE BEEN A STATELY CASTLE”

Old Ruined Castle, Hobbema, Louvre, Paris

[*Courtesy Braun et Cie.*]

battle with the knight, for he is fully armed and I have only my sword. But I will follow, never losing sight of him, and doubtless I shall sooner or later come to a place where arms may be had for pledge or loan. Then I will fight him and break his pride, and on the third day from this, if I have not fallen in the contest, I will be with you again. Farewell.”

“Farewell,” said Guinevere, feeling sad to see the brave young fellow start on such a quest. Then she added more lightly:

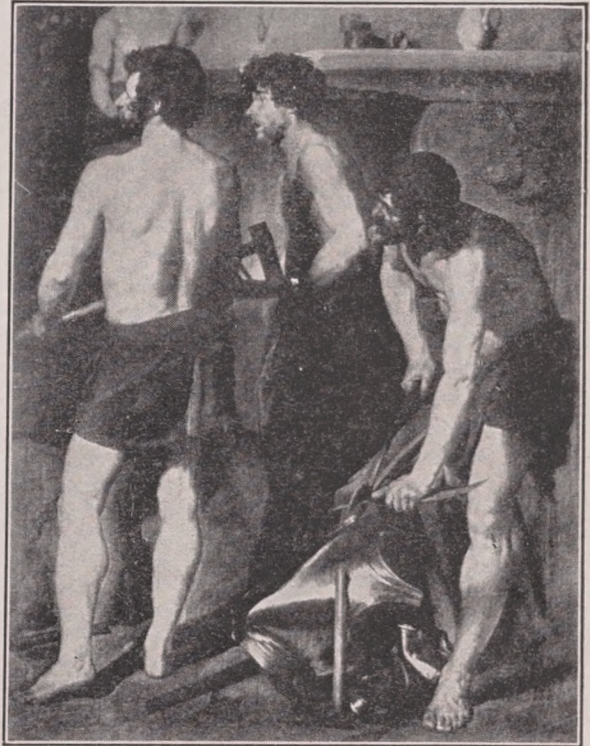
“Perchance in your wanderings, Sir Geraint, you will find the princess who is to bring your heart into bondage.”

At this Geraint glances down the wooden lane which the knight with his two companions was pursuing, then he laughed softly, saying:

“Princesses, Your Majesty, are found in kings’ palaces. By all appearances, if I follow that road, I shall be far more likely to meet with some ragged beggar maiden.”

“Ah well! sometimes a ragged beggar maiden has proved to be a princess in disguise,” replied the Queen. “But however that may be, if you find her, Sir Prince, and are sure that she is the maiden of your choice, bring her to me, though she be dressed in rags and tatters, and I will clothe her for her bridals like the sun. Farewell.”

Then Geraint bowed low to his sovereign, and hastily spurred his horse lest the haughty knight should after all escape him. So he rode by ups and downs, through many a grassy glade, with his eyes fixed upon the three until at last they climbed a ridge beneath which Geraint when he



“GERAINT CAME TO AN ARMORER’S SHOP”

Armourer, Detail from *Forge of Vulcan*, Velasquez, Prado, Madrid [Courtesy Braun & Cie.]

too had reached the spot, beheld the long street of a little town on one side of which rose a fortress white and beautiful as if the workmen had just left it. On the other side, however, he saw the ruins of what had once been a stately castle.

Straight toward the fortress rode the knight with his companions, and was soon lost to sight behind its walls. Nevertheless, Geraint was not discouraged, for he knew that he had now tracked him to his lair; so he passed wearily into the village seeking arms and shelter for the night. He soon discovered, however, that neither would be so easy to find, for this tiny hamlet seemed to be a very busy place

indeed—so busy, in fact, that none of its inhabitants appeared to have any time to talk to the stranger, in reply to whose questions they merely muttered something about a “sparrow-hawk.”

So Geraint presently came to an armorer's shop where a man sat vigorously riveting a helmet. Here he drew rein and called out:

“My man, can I hire some armor from you?”

Whereat the fellow replied, without so much as stopping work or turning his head:

“Friend, he that labors for the Sparrow-hawk has little time for idle gossip. Armor? Certainly not! You will find that each man has need of his own at such a time as this. Do you forget that the Sparrow-Hawk is to-morrow?”

Then Geraint's anger flamed, for this was by no means the first answer of the kind which he had received.

“A thousand pips eat up your sparrow-hawk!” he cried hotly. “You think the cackle of your hamlet the murmur of the whole wide world! But what is it all to me? Speak, if you are not hawk-mad like the rest, and tell me where I may find shelter for the night and arms, arms, arms to fight my enemy!”

At this outburst the armorer looked up amazed; then, seeing that Geraint was richly clad, he came forward with his helmet still in his hand, and answered courteously enough:

“Pardon me, stranger knight! We hold a tourney here to-morrow morning, and we have scarcely time enough between then and now for all the work there is to be done. Arms? Indeed I cannot tell you where you will find any, for all are needed. Shelter? The town is already full, but perhaps the old Earl Yniol who lives in that ruined castle across the bridge yonder would take you in.”

So Geraint, still feeling somewhat annoyed at the reception he was receiving, crossed the bridge and soon reached the gate of the old castle. There, dressed in a suit of frayed magnificence that once had been fit for feasts and ceremonies, sat an aged man with a snowy-white beard.

“Where are you going, my son?” said he as Geraint rode up.

“I am looking for a harborage for the night, good father,” replied the young man.

To which Earl Yniol replied, for the old man was he:

"Then enter here, I pray you, and partake of such poor entertainment as this house can afford."

"I will gladly accept your hospitality," said Geraint, then he added laughingly: "So long as you do not serve me sparrow-hawks for dinner."

At this the old earl sighed, saying:

"My son, graver cause have I than you to curse this hedgerow thief—this Sparrow-Hawk; but ride in, ride in, and we will talk of him later."

So Geraint rode into the court between whose broken stones sprouted many a prickly star and thistle, then passed through a shattered archway plumed with fern, until he stood by a half-fallen tower looking up at a piece of turret stair worn by feet that now were silent. And as he waited he heard the voice of a maiden ringing like the clear note of a bird through the open casement of the hall, and these were the words of her song:

"Turn, Fortune, turn thy wheel and lower the proud;
Turn thy wild wheel thro' sunshine, storm, and cloud;
Thy wheel and thee we neither love nor hate.

"Turn, Fortune, turn thy wheel with smile or frown;
With that wild wheel wo go not up or down;
Our hoard is little, but our hearts are great.

"Smile and we smile, the lords of many lands;
Frown and we smile, the lords of our own hands;
For man is man and master of his fate.

"Turn, turn thy wheel above the staring crowd;
Thy wheel and thou are shadows in the cloud;
Thy wheel and thee we neither love nor hate."

The sweet singer who was thus bidding defiance to the harsh rulings of an unkind fate was Enid, the beautiful young daughter of the old earl; and now as her song ceased she heard her father calling, and hastened down from her bower to aid her mother in welcoming their guest.

As she moved about the hall, clad in her faded silks, preparing

and serving the simple meal with all the grace of a princess, Geraint's eyes followed her until his heart was stirred within him and he said to himself:

"Here is the one maiden in the world for me."

Then as they sat at meat Yniol began to tell his guest the story of his misfortunes.

"You see yonder fortress?" said he. "There lives my bitter enemy and the cause of all our woe. He is my nephew, and a wild and turbulent fellow, therefore I refused him the hand of my daughter, whereupon he caused a vile slander to be circulated concerning me, saying that his father had left him gold in my charge which I refused to render up. Then, just three years ago on the night before my Enid's birthday, he raised my own town against me, and sacked my house, and foully ousted me from my earldom. After which he built that fortress yonder to overawe such of my friends as still are true to me."

Hearing this recital of wrong and cruelty the young knight's fighting blood began to boil within him, and with a flash of his eye he asked eagerly:

"Tell me, Earl Yniol, was that knight whom I saw ride into the fortress to-day with a lady and a little black dwarf your nephew?"

"Yes," replied the old man. "He has come for the sparrow-hawk tournament which is held here every year."

"Ah!" exclaimed Geraint, "the sparrow-hawk tournament, will you tell me about that?"

"Certainly," said the Earl. "It is a tourney for which the prize is a golden sparrow-hawk. Every knight must bring with him the lady whom he loves best in all the world and try to win the sparrow-hawk for her. My nephew has now won it two years in succession, and if he wins it again to-morrow he will never need to fight for it again, for it will be sent to him every year. Therefore the people about here have named him the Sparrow-Hawk knight."

Then Geraint rejoiced, and after telling his kind host and hostess the story of the insult to the Queen, he cried out exultingly:

"Earl Yniol cause had I enough before to wish to fight this haughty Sparrow-Hawk, but now that I have heard this story, I swear that in to-morrow's tourney I will forever break his pride."

Do not tell me his name, I pray you, for I will force it from his own lips. I only ask that you lend me arms."

"Arms?" replied the Earl. "Surely, Prince Geraint, though indeed they are old and battered; but have you forgotten the condition of entering the tournament? The rule is that no knight may tilt unless he brings with him the lady whom he loves best in all the world. Therefore I fear you cannot fight, for doubtless that fair lady is at this moment far away in Arthur's stately halls."

Then Geraint smiled as he answered:

"No, Earl Yniol, that fair lady is not, and never has been, at Arthur's court; for but a few short hours ago I did not even know of her existence. But all that is changed now." Then, leaning slightly forward, he added: "Let me lay my lance in rest, my noble host, for this dear child, your daughter. If I fail, she shall go free and her name remain as untarnished as before; but if I live, and can win your consent and hers, she shall be my true wife."

At this the old man's heart rejoiced, yet he did not wish to sacrifice his child even to better her own fortunes as well as his. He looked about, therefore, only to find that the damsel, at mention of her name, had slipped away; so he turned to his gentle wife who was sitting at his side, saying:

"Mother, a maiden is a tender thing, and you will understand this child of ours better than any one else. Speak to her before she goes to rest, and learn, if you can, what her feelings are toward this young prince."

At an early hour the next morning the whole village was already astir, for this was the greatest day of their entire year. Geraint, his princely bearing showing through his battered armor, rode to the lists with old Yniol, where they were joined by the Countess and the fair Enid, who had shyly given her consent. In the centre of the field were set up two silver forks across which lay a silver rod, and across the rod was placed the golden sparrow-hawk, while circling all about the lists was a great crowd of knights and ladies.

Presently a trumpet was blown, whereupon he who had offered the insult to the Queen rode out proudly with his lady at his side, and cried aloud to her that all might hear:

"Advance, and take as fairest of the fair the prize of beauty which for these two years past I have won for you!"

Thereupon the lady was about to do his bidding when, to the amazement of all present, Geraint stepped forward and said courteously, remembering his knightly respect for all womanhood:

"One moment, I pray you; this year there is another who makes claim to that prize."

At this the haughty Sparrow-Hawk turned and looked disdainfully at Enid in her faded silks and her champion in his rusty armor.

"If you think your lady more worthy of the prize than mine," said he, "are you willing to fight with me to prove it?"

"I am," was Geraint's simple reply.

Then the two set their spears in rest and crashed together so that three times their weapons were splintered, after which they dismounted and drawing their swords lashed at each other with blow on blow until all the crowd marvelled at such an exhibition of prowess. For a long time it seemed that neither would ever be victorious, but just as Geraint, disadvantaged by his rusty armor, was beginning to breathe hard, the voice of old Yniol was heard above the tumult, crying:

"Remember the insult to the Queen!"

At which Geraint's own heart whispered, "And remember, too, the wrongs of Enid!" Then he heaved his blade aloft so that it fell with such force upon his opponent's helmet that it cracked it through and the haughty knight fell to the ground with a crash.

Instantly the victor's foot was set on his enemy's breast, while he cried out:

"As champion of our noble Queen Guinevere whom you have insulted, I demand your name!"

To which the once haughty knight replied:

"I yield! My name is Edryn, son of Nudd."

"Then Edryn, son of Nudd," said Geraint sternly, "three things shall you do, or else you die. First you shall ride with your lady and your dwarf to Arthur's court there to crave pardon of the Queen for your insult; after that you shall return to this place to contradict the vile slanders that you have circulated against your uncle; then you shall give back to him his earldom and relinquish forever all claim to his daughter's hand."

To which Edryn answered meekly:

"My pride is broken, for Enid sees me fall. All these things will I do, Sir Knight; I yield!"

Then Geraint permitted him to rise, and saw him set off toward Caerleon to perform the first part of his promise.

And now it was the morning of the third day after the stag hunt—the day set for Geraint's departure to present his bride at Arthur's court. So Enid in her ivied tower woke early and lay for a time



“THE TWO SET THEIR SPEARS IN REST AND CRASHED TOGETHER”

Tournament, Reubens, Louvre, Paris

[*Courtesy Braun et Cie.*]

thinking joyously of this sudden change in her fortunes until her eye happened to fall upon the faded silk gown that was the very best in her wardrobe. Then—for she was just a girl like other girls—the slow tears began to fall at the thought of the disgrace which such attire must surely bring upon her princely young champion when he presented her to the Queen and the other richly gowned ladies of the court. So it happened that her mother, entering the room presently, found her daughter weeping bitterly on her wedding day.

“My child, my dearest child!” she cried in distress. “What

can be the matter? Is it that you do not, after all, want to marry this brave young knight who has fought so nobly in our cause?"

At this the maiden's sobbing ceased, and she managed to reply in a tone that convinced her mother:

"Oh! no, no, no. How could it be that? He is so brave and strong, yet so gentle and so kind!"

"Then perhaps you dread to leave your father and me," continued the good mother. "But child, child, your husband will often bring you home to visit us and comfort our old age."

But once again the maiden shook her head, and at last, brokenly, through her sobs, she made known the cause of her grief:

"Oh Mother, Mother, it is a new dress that I want!"

At this the Countess smiled and left the room, to reappear presently with a beautiful silken gown all branched and flowered with gold, which she deposited tenderly on a near-by couch.

"Look, Enid," she cried, "and tell me if you know it."

The girl obeyed, and exclaimed in joyous surprise:

"Indeed, Mother, indeed I do! It is the birthday gift you had prepared for me on that unhappy night when our castle was sacked by Edryn's men; but I thought it was destroyed with all our other beautiful things."

"No," replied the Countess, "your father was able to recover it; so now it is to be your wedding gown. Rise quickly and put it on."

Meanwhile Geraint was anxiously awaiting the appearance of his bride-to-be; and, having grown a trifle impatient, he sent word to ask when she would be ready. The message was soon brought to him that her mother was dressing her in her best attire that she might do him credit at the court. At this, suddenly remembering the last words that the Queen had spoken to him, he hesitated for a moment, then he said:

"Ask her as a special favor to me, although I can give her no reason for my wish, that she wear the gown in which I first saw her."

Now when this strange request reached Enid, the girl's smile faded, and she was once again very sad; nevertheless, remembering all that the noble young knight had done for her and her family, she quietly laid aside the beautiful robe in which she was already gowned and put on her old dress, which now looked to her like a withered leaf in mid-November. Then she descended the turret-stairs to meet

her future husband, whose smile showed his pleasure that she had respected his wish, and soon the two mounted horse and rode away.

Meanwhile, during the three days that Geraint had spent in these varied adventures, there had been excitement, too, at court. On the first day, the day of the hunt, Arthur himself had slain the hart; therefore the prize of the beautiful white head had gone to the Queen as the lady whom the King loved best in all the world. On the second day Edryn had arrived to make his humble apology. And now it was the third day—the day on which Geraint had promised to return if he were successful in his quest.

Guinevere, therefore, mounted to the turrets of the castle and stood shading her eyes with her slender white hand and looking far into the distance up the vale of Usk. Presently she perceived a cloud of dust from which there emerged two figures on horseback—a knight and a lady, and after a while she was able to recognize the knight as Geraint.

“But a lady with him!” said the Queen to herself in surprise. “Ah! me, I wonder if he is, after all, bringing me his ragged beggar maiden!”

Then she descended from her tower to greet her champion and thank him for defending her honor. But as she spoke the gracious words, Geraint stepped forward and bowing low, replied:

“Your Majesty, do not thank me, but thank this maiden here, but for whom I could not have fought as I did. She has promised to become my wife, therefore, I have brought her to you in obedience to your last command.”

Meanwhile the ladies of the court had gathered about, and some were inclined to cast scornful glances upon this simple girl in her faded



I WILL CLOTHE HER FOR HER WEDDING AS NEVER MAIDEN WAS CLOTHED BEFORE IN BRITAIN

Beatrice de Cuisance, Van Dyck, Windsor Castle

[Courtesy Braun et Cie.]

gown; but the Queen, looking past the gown into the maiden's lovely face and gentle eyes, opened her arms wide in welcome, then turning to Geraint she said:

“Sir Prince, we gladly receive your bride at Arthur's court. What her name and parentage are you will doubtless inform us later, but I have no fear, for I know that she is royal at heart. Therefore, according to my promise, I will clothe her for her wedding as never maiden was clothed before in Britain; and besides that, the head of the white hart is hers, for she is the first bride to be brought to these halls since the stag hunt.”

GLOSSARY 5

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Armorer</i>, one who makes or repairs armor. 2. <i>Bower</i>, a lady's private room. 3. <i>Hamlet</i>, a small village. 4. <i>Hart</i>, a male deer, especially after it has passed its fifth year. 5. <i>Helmet</i>, a covering of defensive armor for the head. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. <i>Lair</i>, the den of a wild animal. 7. <i>Lance</i>, a long shaft with a spear-head. 8. <i>Lists</i>, a jousting field. 9. <i>Prowess</i>, bravery. 10. <i>Sparrow-hawk</i>, a bird that preys on sparrows or other small birds. |
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VI

Tristram, the Forest Knight

“Tristan, rise.

Were your sins great as Heaven, yet your love,
Being greater still, should burn your guilt away.”

LAURISTON WARD'S "Tristan in Brittany."

WHEN Arthur reigned in Britain there were many minor kings who, though they were allowed to rule over their own countries, nevertheless paid him yearly homage, and these men had frequent quarrels among themselves. One of these disputes arose between King Anguish of Ireland and King Mark of Cornwall about some tribute money which, according to the people of Ireland, should have been paid every year, but which the people of Cornwall had now refused seven times.

King Anguish, therefore, sent a messenger to King Mark demanding the payment of the gold, by whom Mark returned the answer that if Anguish desired the money he must send a champion to fight for it. Not long after this, therefore, there arrived at Tintagel castle, the home of Mark, a valiant man of arms, Sir Marhaus, brother to the Queen of Ireland, and one of the knights of King Arthur's Round Table.

Now that was a condition that Mark had scarcely expected, for despite his bluster he was a craven at heart, as were, in fact, all the knights of his court, so that they had become known far and wide as "the cowardly knights of Cornwall." It was with a trembling spirit, therefore, that he heard the trumpets blown each day at noon announcing to all the countryside that Sir Marhaus of Arthur's Round Table was challenging any gentleman of Cornwall to meet him in single combat as King Mark's champion for the tribute money.

Day after day the call went forth, and day after day there was

no response, for those dastardly Cornish knights had hidden themselves away in their strong towers, and the King himself would rather have submitted to any humiliation than put his own precious life in jeopardy. But at last one morning, when the story of King Mark's predicament had spread to distant lands, there appeared before the harassed monarch a young man, tall of stature and of fair countenance, who made the following request:

"Sir King, I am as yet but a squire, although well versed in the use of arms. If you will make me knight I will promise to serve you faithfully all the days of my life, and to go forth upon whatever quests you may see fit to send me."

Hearing these words, the King's eyes gleamed with a crafty light, for what he lacked in prowess he made up in cunning, so that he was known as Mark the Fox. Then he replied:

"Young man, if you will promise to fight the first battle I assign you, I will make you knight on the spot."

To which the youth answered:

"Willingly, Sire, the first and the last, and all others that may come between."

Then he knelt and placing his hand in his sovereign's received three strokes with the flat of the King's sword, and took the holy vow of knighthood which bound him in loyalty to Mark for all time; after which he arose saying eagerly:

"And now with whom shall I do battle, Sir King?"

"Your first fight," replied Mark, "shall be as my champion for the tribute money against Sir Marhaus of Ireland."

"Let it be so proclaimed!" cried the young man, joyfully brandishing his sword.

But when Sir Marhaus received the news which he had long since ceased to expect—that a champion had been found for Cornwall, he returned the following answer:

"I will fight with no man that is not of royal blood, son of a king or a queen."

Now Mark understood full well by this that his enemy was trying to draw him personally into the combat, and his heart sank within him. In great distress, therefore, he sent for his newly-made knight and explained the situation to him, whereupon the brave young man replied:

“Sire, I pray you, give yourself no anxiety. I had hoped to keep my identity a secret until I had proved myself; but now I will tell you all. I am the son of your sister Elizabeth and of King Meliodas of Lyonesse. They call me the forest knight because I was born in the deep, dark woods where my mother had wandered in search of my father when he had been enticed away by the wiles of a wicked enchantress. As you know, she died there before finding him; but with her last breath, as she entrusted me to the care of a faithful lady in waiting, she named me Tristram—the child of sorrow. Thus you see I have never known a mother’s love; nevertheless my father has had me carefully trained in the manly sports of harping, hunting and hawking, as well as in the more serious art of the joust and the tourney. Therefore, hearing that my mother’s country was being shamed for lack of a champion, I came to present myself; and Sir Marhaus need have no fear, for my rank is higher than his.”

Then the King’s foxy old heart rejoiced, and arrangements were made for the combat to take place on an island near which the ships of the Irish knight were anchored. On the day appointed, therefore, the two champions, each on horseback, set their spears in rest and crashed together with such a mighty shock that both were thrown to the ground. Then they drew their swords, and throwing their shields before them, fought on and on for more than half a day until both were severely wounded. At last, however, Tristram was able to give his opponent such a stroke that Sir Marhaus’ armor was pierced, and the young knight’s sword stuck fast, so that he had to pull mightily three times before it could be dislodged. Then Mar-



“SIR MARHAUS—WAS CHALLENGING ANY GENTLEMAN OF CORNWALL”

The Duke of Alba, Moro, Old Masters

[Courtesy Braun et Cie.]

haus fell to the ground, but recovering himself, threw away his sword and his shield, and fled for his life to his ships.

Thus was the honor of Cornwall saved; for Sir Marhaus, having failed in his mission, set sail at once for Ireland to be cared for by his sister, the Queen, who was well versed in the art of healing. When his wound was probed, however, a small, jagged piece of the steel of Tristram's sword was found therein, which the Queen, realizing that she was going to be unable, with all her skill, to save her brother, put carefully away, vowing that in revenge she would take the life of the man into whose weapon it fitted should he ever cross her path. Soon after this Sir Marhaus died.

Now when Tristram returned to the mainland victorious, great was the rejoicing, and loud were the praises of the people for their valiant young champion—so loud, indeed, that King Mark's jealousy was aroused, and he began to fear his nephew as a possible rival to the throne. It was with secret joy, therefore, that he realized how seriously the young knight had been wounded; for it was found that Sir Marhaus, contrary to all the laws of knighthood, had used a poisoned spear. So Tristram lay ill for a month or more, and all the skill of surgeons and leeches was of little avail until one day there came to court a lady who gave the following advice:

“Let the young knight go to the land from which the deadly poison came. There he may be helped, but nowhere else.”

At this the King was secretly delighted, for he thought to himself:

“If Tristram goes to Ireland, the Queen whose brother he slew will see to it that he never escapes alive.”

But aloud he said:

“Make ready my ships, for so help me, I would not that my beloved nephew died.”

So when all was prepared, Tristram, in the care of his trusted serving man Gouvernail, sailed away followed by the good wishes of every man and woman in Cornwall save his own uncle who sincerely hoped never to see him set foot on those shores again. During the crossing, Tristram, who was too weak to do much else, had ample time to think over the situation in which he was soon to find himself; and he came to realize that, if his true name were known, he would scarcely be a welcome guest at the Irish court. He there-

fore decided to present himself as a strolling minstrel called Tramtrist of Lyonesse who had been accidentally wounded in battle.

Now, during some years that he had spent in France, Tristram had become a very skillful harper, so that when King Anguish heard him play he was greatly pleased with the performance, and said:

“Sir Tramtrist, you are very welcome at our court and to the care of our leeches, and of the Queen who is the most skillful of them all in the healing of wounds. Then, when you are stronger, we should count it an honor if you would consent to give our daughter, the Princess Isolda, lessons in harping.”

So Tristram remained, receiving the ministrations of the Queen, and acting as tutor to the beautiful Isolda; and so charmed did he become with this latter occupation that he very soon lost all desire to return either to his father's kingdom of Lyonesse or to his uncle's court in Cornwall. In fact he was now beginning to dread the time when his wound would be completely healed.

He had not been long, however, in these intimate relations with his pupil before he discovered that she was strangely sad for one so young and apparently so free from care. One evening, therefore, when the twilight had overtaken them in the midst of a lesson, and she sat with her golden head leaning against her harp while her white fingers idly swept the strings, calling forth from time to time a low and plaintive strain, Tristram leaned forward and asked gently:

“Princess, will you tell me why it is that you are never merry like other maidens?”

Then the beautiful Isolda sighed and bent her head still lower. Presently she said:

“Ah! Sir Tramtrist, the lot of a king's daughter may seem to other maidens one to be envied, but I assure you that it is hard, very hard indeed.”

“And why so hard, Princess?” inquired the young man.

She hesitated for a moment, then she said:

“Sir Tramtrist, I will tell you all. My father has an enemy, a mighty Saracen knight called Palamides of whom our whole kingdom is in dread. He has sued for my hand; therefore my father, in the forlorn hope that some brave man may be found to overcome him, has proclaimed a great joust and tournament in which any knight that pleases may take part, and for the winning of which I am the

prize. You can well understand, then, why I am sad, for I know full well that no gentleman of Ireland is able to stand against this mighty Saracen, so I shall be given to him to save my country from ruin, and carried far away into a heathen land."

"Princess," cried Sir Tristram leaping to his feet, "that shall never be! I will fight in this tournament; and rest assured, the love I bear you will so strengthen my arm that I will overthrow this man though his natural strength be ten times greater than mine."

But Isolda only sighed shaking her head, and replied:

"I wish, Oh! I wish, my teacher, that it might be so; but I fear it would never be permitted, for you are but a wandering minstrel and Palamides's rank is very high. Besides, your wound is not yet healed."

Then the young man drew himself to his full height as he said:

"As for my wound, fair Princess, it no longer troubles me; and as for my rank, I will tell you a part of my secret though I dare not as yet tell you all. I am in truth a king's son, worthy to be matched in battle with any man that lives; so I will gladly risk my life in this cause. But I ask you not to let it be known beforehand that I am to take part in this contest."

Thus it was arranged between them.

The great day of the joust arrived. The mighty Palamides rode proudly into the field on his black war horse bearing before him an enormous black shield. There, on the first day of the tournament, he overthrew every knight that dared to come before him until all the people marvelled at such feats of prowess. Then he retired, to return to the lists the following morning more certain than ever, if that were possible, that the fair prize would soon be his. Riding to the centre of the field, therefore, he flourished his sword calling loudly for any man who would dare continue the contest.

For a moment there was an ominous silence, then suddenly the postern gate of the castle swung wide and there rode forth upon a white horse a knight in snow-white armor. Straight toward Palamides he came, who instantly put his spear in rest and the two crashed together so that the scene appeared to the breathless onlookers like a deadly struggle between the powers of Light and the powers of Darkness. Long and hard was the combat, but at last the black knight was thrown to earth crying:

“I yield!”

Then Tristram standing over him with his sword upraised said sternly:

“Promise me, as you value your life, that you will give up all claim to the hand of the Princess Isolda; that you will leave Ireland forever in peace; and that for a year and a day you will bear no arms in any Christian country.”

To all of which Palamides replied:

“I promise; alas! I am shamed forever!”

After which Tristram allowed him to rise, then he himself rode back to the postern gate where Isolda was waiting his coming with a strange new light of joy on her face.

And now there followed happy days for Tristram, the child of sorrow, and for Isolda the princess from whose life the shadow of a dreaded doom seemed forever lifted. The King and the Queen cherished their brave young champion as if he had been their own son, and despite the mystery in which his birth was still enshrouded, they were willing to agree to a union between him and the Princess, for they felt sure that he spoke the truth when he said that royal blood ran in his veins. So the preparations for the wedding progressed; and each morning Tristram arose with the intention of telling his kind hosts the whole story, and each day his courage failed him.

One afternoon he had gone out, carelessly leaving his sword behind him in the room where the Queen and the Princess with their maidens were busy upon the wedding garments. Isolda, having bent over an embroidery frame until she was weary, rose and stepped across the room till she stood by the table where the brand lay. It was a beautiful weapon with a bejewelled hilt, and the Princess, thinking proudly of all the valiant deeds in which it had figured, drew it curiously from its scabbard. Suddenly she exclaimed:

“Why mother, there is a piece broken out from the edge! I wonder in what wonderful feat of prowess that happened!”

At those words, so carelessly spoken, the Queen, dropping her work, had sprung to her feet.

“Let me see,” she cried, almost snatching the sword from her daughter’s hand. Then to Isolda’s surprise she rushed toward a box where she had secretly hidden the bit of steel that she had taken

from her brother's wound, and with trembling fingers fitted it exactly into the gap.

"At last, at last!" she exclaimed triumphantly. "I have found him, the foul knight who slew your uncle. And he shall die, he shall die, according to my vow!"

Not even the snowy wedding gown that had fallen to the ground in the excitement was as white as Isolda's face when she heard those words, for she knew well enough how cruel her mother could be toward an enemy. In another moment, therefore, she had rushed from the room in search of her father, in whose kindness of disposition was her only hope for the salvation of her lover.

"My child," said he gently, "my poor little girl, I will do all that lies in my power to save your knight from your mother's wrath, for I am convinced that, though he slew your uncle, he did so in honorable combat. He should have told us the whole truth when he came among us, I admit; nevertheless, I will see to it that he is permitted to leave our shores in safety, but he must bid farewell to you, forever, for now you can never become his wife."

So that very day the parting came between Tristram and the beautiful Isolda who was so soon to have been his bride.

"I leave you free, my Princess," he said, "but for my part I will take upon myself such a vow as is made by the noble knights of Arthur's court—to love you only through all the days of my life, and to worship you by years of noble deeds though I may never win you. Farewell, and remember if ever you are in need of a champion to do battle for you, I will come though it be from the ends of the earth."

So he sailed away.

Time went on. Tristram, much to the secret annoyance of King Mark, returned to Cornwall, where his brave deeds caused him more and more to be admired and loved by his uncle's people; so that the old Fox never ceased to ponder upon some method that should appear entirely accidental of ridding himself of this troublesome nephew.

One day in early spring when Mark's knights were feasting and making merry about a lavish board, it chanced that, the air being warm, a window was open facing the western sea. Through this window there presently flew a swallow carrying in its bill a hair of

most brilliant gold, which it deposited on the arm of the King's chair, after which it immediately fluttered out into the sunshine again.

"By my life!" exclaimed the Fox, "I should like to see the maiden from whose head this came. Can any of you tell me where she may be found?"

Then the beautiful shining thing was passed from one knight to the other, and each in turn shook his head until it came to Tristram, who, as the King noticed, had turned very pale. Glad would he have been to remain silent, but Mark, turning the attention of the whole table to him, inquired maliciously:

"Nephew, you appear to have some knowledge of this matter. Can you by any chance inform us whence this thread of gold came?"

Then Tristram, who would have scorned to tell a lie, answered reluctantly:

"Sire, I can."

"We await your information," said the King.

And still more slowly and reluctantly came the words from Tristram's white lips.

"Such hair as that, Sire, belongs to but one woman in all the world—the beautiful Isolda, Princess of Ireland."

At that the old Fox's heart rejoiced, for he now felt sure that he had hit upon a plan that could scarcely fail to bring sorrow, and possibly destruction, to his nephew.

"My noble knights," said he, "it has suddenly become the desire of my heart to wed the maiden to whom this glorious hair belongs. How many of you are willing to go for me to the court of King Anguish and bear my request for her hand?"

Thereupon there followed a scene that would have acquainted



"THE BEAUTIFUL ISOLDA PRINCESS OF IRELAND"

Portrait, Kaufmann, Budapest. [Courtesy Braun et Cie.]

a stranger with the fact, even had he learned it no other way, that he was not at Arthur's court; for each of those cowardly Cornish knights began to fumble with the fastening of his sword hoping that his neighbor would have his drawn first. To this unknighthly conduct, however, just as King Mark had expected, there was one exception—Tristram's brand had leaped from its scabbard as if of its own volition and was now being held aloft, while his voice rang out clear and strong:

“The quest, Sir King!”

At which Mark smiled his crafty smile, and answered:

“You are willing to do even this for me, Nephew?”

Then Tristram, true knight that he was, although he knew in what peril of his life he would find himself as soon as he landed on Irish shores, and although he realized that death would be as nothing to him compared with the pain of succeeding in his mission, remembered his vow, and answered bravely:

“Sire, I am.”

So, within a few days, Tristram set sail for Ireland a second time, disguised on this occasion as a merchant selling costly silks and samites. And certainly fortune seemed after all to favor him, for he chanced to arrive at a time when the whole country was in great fear because of a terrible dragon that was devastating the land. Once again, therefore, when he looked into the beautiful face of Isolda to whose presence he gained admission under pretence of selling his wares, he saw that she was sad; and he soon learned that this time the King had promised her hand to whoever would kill the frightful monster.

Nothing daunted, therefore, he set out one bright morning for the forest where the dreaded beast was supposed to have his lair. There in the deepest shade of the oldest trees he found him at last with his great, scaly body twisted about one of the mighty trunks. At the young knight's approach the ugly head shot forth, and the immense jaws snapped open with the evident intention of closing again immediately upon the intruder, but instead of that it was Tristram's good sword upon which the tusks came together, and in a short time, with a terrible hiss and a tremendous crash, the monster fell to the ground and lay motionless.

For a moment Tristram, still breathing hard from the struggle,

stood looking down upon his prostrate foe. Then, realizing that he had no proof of having performed the feat, he drew his brand and cut out the creature's tongue, after which he started on his way back to the palace. He had not gone far, however, when a strange faint-



"WITH A TREMENDOUS CRASH THE MONSTER FELL TO THE GROUND"

Landscape, Le Dominiquin, London.

[*Courtesy Braun et Cie.*]

ness overcame him, and a little later he fell senseless by a spring where he had gone to seek a cooling draught; for the truth was that the tongue which he had wrapped in his garments contained a deadly poison.

Now there was at the court of King Anguish a cowardly steward who had long cherished a dream of advancement by marriage with the Princess, but who was far too much of a craven to fight either

man or beast in her behalf. As fate would have it therefore, it happened that this man, wandering through the forest, came accidentally upon the body of the dragon whose head he valiantly cut off, after which he presented himself before the King as the hero who had delivered Ireland. But neither King nor Queen nor Princess believed his story, and a search party was therefore sent out to make investigations. After a day or two this party returned, carrying the unconscious form of the merchant which they had come across in their wanderings.

While there was still no proof, the King and the whole court soon became convinced that this stranger was the true hero; and although in nursing him back to health the Queen soon recognized him as Tristram of Cornwall, the slayer of her brother, she was nevertheless prevailed upon by the entreaties of both husband and daughter to forego her revenge and spare the young man's life.

At last the great day came when the court had assembled to witness the awarding of Isolda's hand to him who had killed the dragon; and, as all had expected, the steward was the first to step forward to claim the fair prize.

"What proof have you?" demanded the King with a sinking heart.

"Sire, this head," replied the steward, displaying the ghastly trophy.

Then Tristram, who had been standing quietly in the background, now made his way to the front, and cried aloud:

"Your Majesty, he speaks falsely! Bid your men, I pray you, open the monster's jaws. They will find no tongue therein."

The men did as they were bidden, whereupon Tristram's serving man stepped forward bearing the ugly, forked tongue and fitted it exactly into the beast's mouth. Then all the people shouted for joy; for they had loved this young knight in the old days; and even the Queen's heart was softened toward him.

So, as the ladies and gentlemen of the court stood circling about the throne, and the beautiful Isolda sat by the side of her parents with flushed cheeks and lowered eyes, the King arose to make the proclamation which would so have gladdened the heart of Tristram had his mission been other than it was:

"Sir Knight, you have once again proved yourself the savior of

our beloved land of Ireland. The hand of the Princess is therefore yours. Do you claim the prize?"

The blush upon Isolda's cheeks had deepened, and her head was bent still lower as she waited with beating heart for the reply of her hero who had now risked his life for her a second time. Presently, as if from some great distance, in a harsh, strained voice that she could scarcely believe to be that of her old tutor's, these words reached her ears:

"Sire, I claim the hand of the Princess Isolda for my uncle, King Mark of Cornwall, who has sent me here to seek her as his bride."

There was silence. Swiftly through the mind of both King and Queen there passed the same thought: "This marriage would be an advantage to the country, and would settle forever, as no fighting could do, the vexed question of the tribute money." Presently turning toward his daughter, therefore, King Anguish said:

"Isolda, the honor done you is greater than we had supposed. A king will make a better husband for you than an ordinary knight."

Which words were echoed by the Queen: "Ah! yes, a king will make a better husband than an ordinary knight."

Then the Princess, rising in her place, turned flashing eyes of scorn upon King Mark's emissary and answered with proudly lifted head:

"Certainly, a king will make a better husband for me than an ordinary knight."

Whereupon Tristram, the deathly pallor of whose face now matched her own, bowed low and retired to make his preparations for the departure.

Within a few days the little ship bearing King Mark's unwilling bride to Tintagel castle was tossing upon the waves of the Irish sea. All during the strange journey Tristram, loyal as ever to his uncle, had kept himself apart from the Princess whose anger was so kindled at his apparently inexplicable conduct that she in her turn had made no attempt to communicate with him in any way. And now the end, so dreaded by both, was drawing near.

It happened, however, that the Queen, fearing that after all her daughter's heart was still with the young knight, and being concerned, despite her ambition, for the maiden's happiness, had used all her art in preparing a magic love potion which she had intrusted

to the care of Isolda's maid with strict injunctions that it should be given to the Princess when she and Mark were alone together, so that the maiden's eyes should rest upon her future husband at the moment of drinking. But it also happened that Isolda too had brewed a potion which was a deadly draught, the swallowing of which would result in instant death.

Now, as the turrets of Tintagel castle began to loom out of the mist, the Princess turned suddenly to her maid with the command:

"Bring me the small flask that lies upon my table."

But the faithful maid, having caught the desperate look in Isolda's eyes, suspected the truth, and with the wild hope of saving her young mistress substituted the Queen's philtre for the one for which the Princess was calling.

Hastily Isolda took the cup from the girl's hand, and turning so that her dying eyes might rest upon her hero who was standing in the prow of the boat gazing sadly toward the fast approaching Cornish shore, raised it to her lips. Instantly, as if in some mystic way he knew what was happening, Tristram turned and beheld what he believed to be the maiden's desperate deed. In another moment he had reached her side, snatched the fateful goblet from her shaking fingers, and drained the liquid that she had left to the last drop. Then as the glass dropped from his hand, the pair of ill-starred lovers stood looking into each other's eyes awaiting death.

One, two, three long minutes passed while the draught was taking its unexpected effect; for, instead of the chill of death there began to sweep through their veins a wonderful tingle of life and happiness beyond all that their imagination could have conceived. Suddenly, realizing at last what had happened, and knowing that they now loved each other ten times more than ever, the cry burst simultaneously from their lips:

"Tristram!"

"Isolda!"

And at that moment the ship's keel ground upon the beach.

Then slowly and painfully the memory of things as they were returned to them; and Tristram, reverently taking Isolda's white hand in his said gently:

"Princess, the honor of my knighthood binds me to fulfill in letter and in spirit any mission upon which I am sent by him who

made me knight. If I failed in this I should not be worthy of you. Within a few moments, therefore, I shall deliver you into the keeping of King Mark as whose honored Queen I pray you may find happiness. After that I shall ride away and seek adventure as a brave knight should. But once again at this, our second parting, I repeat the promise that I made you long ago—to love you only through all the days of my life, and to worship you by years of noble deeds though I may never hope to win you. Farewell, and remember that, should you ever need a champion, I will come.”

Again the weary years crept on, and Queen Isolda lived a sad and lonely life in her high tower of Tintagel castle looking out upon the Irish Sea; for King Mark proved no kinder as a husband than he had proved as an uncle. In fact his sole reason for seeking the Irish Princess in marriage had been to cause pain to his nephew and drive him from Cornwall.

From time to time news reached Tintagel of the brave deeds done at Arthur's court by a knight that had lately come there—a certain Sir Tristram of Lyonesse whose reputation for prowess was fast becoming almost as great as the mighty Launcelot's. Then Queen Isolda's sad heart beat with pride, for she knew that her champion was being true to his vow.

King Mark, however, was beloved neither by his own people nor by the monarchs of neighboring lands, so it happened that his troubles with Ireland were not the only difficulties in which he managed to get himself entangled. When he and Isolda had been married some years, therefore, it chanced that Tintagel castle was besieged by the Saxons under a captain named Elias who was a good man of arms. As usual, when the challenge came to single combat, Mark refused to risk his own life, as did all the cowardly knights of Cornwall. At last one of them made the following valiant suggestion:

“Sire, send to Arthur's court for a champion; for he has promised, as is well known, to drive the heathen from the land.”

Accordingly, one day when Arthur's court was in session at Camelot, there arrived a messenger from King Mark. The moment the man had ceased speaking after presenting his plea, every sword in the old hall was pointed upward, while the cry so often heard within those walls rang out strong and clear:

“The quest, Sir King!”

Arthur looked about among that goodly fellowship until his eye rested upon Tristram, whose relation to the Cornish king was known to him. Then, with an inclination of the head, he assigned to him the quest.

So Tristram, rejoicing that once again he was to have an opportunity of serving Isolda, rode away to Cornwall with a gladder heart than he had known in many a day.

There, in single combat, he met Elias and overthrew him, while Mark and his valiant knights remained bravely behind the sheltering walls of the castle. But, so helpless is man to escape his doom, although Tristram came forth from the encounter unharmed, a stray arrow shot at random by one of the Saxon soldiers hit King Mark, so that he died soon after of the wound.

Then the people of Cornwall, in whose hearts Tristram had always lived as a hero, proclaimed him King in his uncle's stead; and the beautiful Isolda, after the long years of their separation, became his wife.

When the wedding ceremonies were at an end, the newly made monarch set out for Arthur's court to pay homage and to present his bride; and when they reached Camelot it was discovered that the siege which had formerly belonged to Sir Marhaus, the man who had disgraced his knighthood by using a poisoned spear, bore a new inscription in letters of shining gold:

“THIS IS THE SEAT OF THE NOBLE KNIGHT, SIR TRISTRAM.”

GLOSSARY 6

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| 1. <i>Brand</i> , a sword. | 13. <i>Potion</i> , a liquid; frequently like the above. |
| 2. <i>Brandish</i> , to wave or shake a weapon. | 14. <i>Postern gate</i> , the back gate. |
| 3. <i>Challenge</i> , to invite to combat. | 15. <i>Prowess</i> , bravery. |
| 4. <i>Craven</i> , a coward. | 16. <i>Samite</i> , a cloth like satin, with glistening threads of silver and gold. |
| 5. <i>Dastardly</i> , cowardly. | 17. <i>Saracen</i> , a name adopted by the Arabs after their settlement in Europe. |
| 6. <i>Emissary</i> , a person sent on a mission. | 18. <i>Scabbard</i> , the sheath of a sword. |
| 7. <i>Feat</i> , an achievement. | 19. <i>Siege</i> , a seat. |
| 8. <i>Homage</i> , the ceremony of professing fealty. | 20. <i>Tribute</i> , money paid as an acknowledgment of submission. |
| 9. <i>Leech</i> , a physician. | 21. <i>Trophy</i> , anything taken from an enemy and treasured as a proof of victory. |
| 10. <i>Lists</i> , the field of tournaments. | |
| 11. <i>Minstrel</i> , a musician, poet and singer. | |
| 12. <i>Philtre</i> , a charmed liquid supposed to have the power of exciting love. | |

VII

The Adventures of Launcelot

“His honor rooted in dishonor stood,
And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true.”

TENNYSON'S “Lancelot and Elaine.”

WITH prancing steeds and waving plumes and glittering arms, King Arthur and his gallant knights had ridden away to Camelot where the last great “diamond joust” was to be held.

For eight years past this joust had been an annual occurrence; for Arthur, long before he became King, once while roaming through the trackless realms of Lyonesse had stumbled unawares in the misty moonshine upon the skeleton of a long-forgotten king still wearing his crown. This diadem of richly wrought gold, decorated with nine diamonds—one in front and four on each side, he had placed upon his boyish head; and as he did so had seemed to hear within him the murmur of a voice saying:

“Lo, thou likewise shalt be king.”

And years after, when that mystic prophecy had been fulfilled, he had removed the gems from the crown and showed them to his knights, exclaiming:

“These jewels which I chanced upon are the kingdom's, not the King's. Therefore, let there be once every year a joust for one of them. Thus by nine years' proof we shall learn which is the mightiest man among us.”

So for eight years the tourney had been held; and Launcelot had won the diamond each time, with the intention of presenting the entire nine to the Queen when all should be his.

But a rumor had gone abroad, doubtless started in jealousy, that it was no longer by his prowess alone that the mighty Launcelot was

able to perform such feats of arms, but by the terror which his very name inspired. Whereupon the proud knight had decided upon a course that should forever silence that slander.

When the King and his knights rode off, therefore, Launcelot remained behind pleading as his excuse a wound lately received in battle which had not yet healed. But towards noon he got himself quickly to horse, and, avoiding the beaten thoroughfare, chose the

green, unfrequented paths until, as the sun was setting, he saw on a far hill outlined against the golden glory of the west the towers of Astolat Castle.

To this old fortress, realizing that he must needs seek harborage for the night, he made his way; and wound the great horn that hung by the gate. Presently there appeared in response an old and wrinkled servitor, who, without speaking a word yet made the errant knight feel that he was welcome, and disarmed him. Thereupon there issued from an inner apartment the Lord of Astolat himself with his two stalwart sons, Sir Torre and Sir Lavaine; and close behind them shyly stepped the one lady of the house, Lord Astolat's motherless daughter—the Lily Maid Elaine.

“Whence do you come, my guest, and what is your name?” inquired the master of the castle. “Surely, judging by your appearance, you are one of the knights that follow the great White King.”

To which Launcelot replied:

“Yes, I come from Arthur's Hall, and am one of the Round Table; but I beg you not to ask my name, for I am at this moment on my way to Camelot to joust for the great diamond; and for certain reasons I wish to enter the lists in disguise. Yet I have made



THE TOWERS OF ASTOLAT CASTLE
Landscape, Ruysdael, Old Masters
[Courtesy Braun et Cie.]

the mistake of bringing with me my shield by which I should be immediately recognized. I pray you, therefore, if you have such an one, to lend me a scutcheon that is still blank, or at least one that bears some other device than my own."

"Willingly, stranger knight," said the Lord of Astolat. "Here is my son Torre's who was hurt in his first tilt, so that his shield is blank enough. You can have that."

Presently all five passed into the castle and sat down to a board where the very best of meats and vintage had been brought forth for the entertainment of the guest. There, at the earnest request of Lavaine, who had suddenly become fired with boundless admiration for the great man, Launcelot was led on to talk of Arthur and his Round Table and his wonderful wars; and while he talked the Lily Maid sat by, a silent listener, until his princely bearing and gracious courtesy had completely won her heart. At last she raised her eyes to his face, bronzed and worn with care, and scarred with many a soul conflict between right and wrong, "and loved him with that love which was her doom."

It had been decided, much to Lavaine's delight, that he should accompany the stranger to the lists and himself take part in the tournament. Early the next morning, therefore, Elaine arose endeavoring to deceive herself into the belief that she wished to bid farewell to her brother before his departure. So it happened that as she glided down the tower stairs she passed Lavaine on his way to get his brother's blank shield and thus came upon the stranger knight alone as he stood with his back toward her stroking the glossy shoulder of his proud charger. At the sound of her light footfalls he turned suddenly, more amazed to see the maiden standing there in the dewy light of dawn than if seven men had set upon him at once.

In fact he had not dreamed before that she was so beautiful; and now a sort of sacred fear took possession of him, for though he greeted her she still remained silent with her rapt gaze fixed upon him as if she were looking into the face of a god. And at that look, coming through her innocent eyes straight from her spotless soul, a swift flush mantled Launcelot's cheek, for he knew that he was unworthy of such homage, and he murmured sadly to himself:

"Alas! I am not great, 'save it be some far-off touch of greatness to know well I am not great.'"

Presently, mustering all her courage, the maiden began to speak: "Great lord, whose name I do not know, although I believe it is the noblest, will you wear my favor in this tourney?"

Then Launcelot scarcely knew how to answer her, for before his eyes there passed the radiant vision of another whose favor he might never wear. Presently he said, turning away that he might not see her disappointment:

"Fair damsel, that would be against my custom. I never yet have worn the token of any lady in the lists, as all who know me are well aware."

"Then in wearing mine," continued Elaine, made strangely bold by her great desire, "there will be the lesser likelihood of your being recognized."

"That is true, my child," replied Launcelot, suddenly perceiving wisdom in the suggestion. "I will wear it. Run and fetch it for me."

So she disappeared, to return presently with a red velvet sleeve beautifully embroidered with shining pearls which she bound upon his helmet. When this was done, he looked down upon her smilingly and said:

"Never yet have I done so much for any maiden living."

At which words the color sprang into her cheeks with delight, but quickly vanished again leaving her a Lily Maid indeed.

By this time, however, Lavaine had returned with Torre's shield, and the two knights made ready to depart.

"Do me the grace, my child, to keep my shield till I come back," said Launcelot taking the unblazoned scutcheon and handing his own, upon which there gleamed the famous azure lions in jewelled splendor, to the fair Elaine.

Then Lavaine kissed his sister's pale cheeks, and the stranger knight kissed her hand in courtier fashion. After which they spurred their chargers and were soon lost to sight as they dipped below the downs.

Thus it came about that—

"Elaine the fair, Elaine the lovable,
Elaine the lily-maid of Astolat,
High in her chamber up a tower to the east,
Guarded the sacred shield of Launcelot."

And there, spending her days in sweet dreams and vain imaginings, she placed the shield where the first glint of sunrise might strike the jewelled lions and awaken her with its glory. After a while, however, fearing that the precious thing might become rusted or soiled, she fashioned for it a silken case upon which she embroidered the devices which were blazoned on the scutcheon itself; and as she worked she made a story to herself of every dint a sword had beaten in it, and every scratch a lance had made upon it.

Meanwhile the two knights rode on their way toward Camelot, and as they drew near to the lists Launcelot thought it best to reveal his name to his companion.

“Launcelot of the Lake! The great Launcelot!” murmured the youth in awed voice. “At last I have my wish! I have seen Britain’s greatest knight, and now if I might also behold her White King, the mighty Arthur Pendragon, though I were stricken blind the next moment, I should be satisfied.”

Launcelot smiled at this boyish enthusiasm, but made no reply save to wave his hand toward the jousting field which they were already entering. There Lavaine beheld, like a rainbow fallen upon the grass, a great half-round gallery filled with gorgeously attired spectators. But his eyes wandered past all this until they rested upon the royal throne where the clear-faced King sat robed in red samite, easily distinguished by the presence all about him of the emblem of the house of Pendragon; for—

“— to his crown the golden dragon clung,
And down his robe the dragon writhed in gold,
And from the carven-work behind him crept
Two dragons gilded, sloping down to make
Arms for his chair, while all the rest of them
Thro’ knots and loops and folds innumerable
Fled ever thro’ the woodwork, till they found
The new design wherein they lost themselves,
Yet with all ease, so tender was the work.”

Above his head was set a costly canopy ornamented with a carven flower whose heart was the wonderful diamond which was to be the prize of the day.

Presently the trumpets blew, and both sides, those that held the lists and those that were the assailants, set their spears in rest, struck their spurs, and suddenly moved forward to meet in the centre of the field with such a furious shock that the hard earth shook beneath them.

Launcelot, however, remained apart for a while until he saw which side was the weaker, then he hurled himself against the stronger which happened to be his own order of the Round Table. And little need is there to speak of his prowess, for king, duke, earl, count, baron—whoever he smote he overthrew.

There were, however, in the field that day many of his own relatives. These strong men now became angered at the thought that a stranger should do, and almost outdo, the deeds of their valiant kinsman; but one of them said:

“Do you know, I believe it is our cousin Launcelot in disguise.”

To which another replied:

“No, that cannot be, for Launcelot never yet has worn a lady’s token in the lists.”

Then a fury seemed to seize them—a fiery family passion for the glory of the mighty Launcelot; and suddenly, like the wild waves of the North Sea, they pricked their steeds and bore down upon the knight with the red sleeve, seeking by the weight of men and horses to overwhelm him. Presently Launcelot’s noble charger was lamed, and he himself wounded by a lance which pierced through shield and mail, and then snapped leaving its head buried in his side.

Fortunately, however, Lavaine had seen his beloved hero fall. With one terrible blow, therefore, he overthrew a knight of old repute and brought the man’s horse to where Launcelot lay, who, despite the agony of his wound, mounted and managed in a way that seemed to the onlookers like a miracle to drive his kith and kin, and all the Round Table, back to the barrier. Thereupon the heralds blew proclaiming that the prize belonged to the stranger knight who wore the scarlet, pearl embroidered sleeve.

At this his side cried aloud in triumph:

“Advance, and take your prize, the largest diamond of the nine!”

To which the victor replied:

“Do not talk to me of diamonds, but give me air; nor of prizes, for my prize is death!”

And with that he and young Lavaine suddenly wheeled their horses, and vanished from the field into a nearby poplar grove. There Launcelot slid from his horse and sat gasping until a kindly hermit who lived near carried him into his grotto where he and Lavaine managed to stanch the wound. So in that peaceful spot, far from the world's rumor, the mighty Launcelot, the darling of the court, lay for many weeks in daily doubt whether he would live or die.

But on the day when the victor had thus fled the lists, Arthur, sorely troubled because the valiant stranger had been too badly wounded to take his prize, and fearing in his heart that the disguised knight was Launcelot after all, called Sir Gawain to his side and said:

"The victor must not go uncared for. Ride forth, therefore, and find him; for wounded and wearied as he is, he cannot have gone far. And take also the diamond and deliver it into his hands, then return and bring me word how he fares."

So Gawain rode through the region round about touching at all points except the poplar grove until he was wearied of the quest. In his wanderings, however, it chanced that he came one day to Astolat.

The moment the fair Elaine's eyes rested upon his arms she guessed him to be one of Arthur's knights and cried out:

"What news from Camelot, lord? What of the knight with the red sleeve?"

"He won—"

"I knew it!" broke in the maiden.

"—but departed from the lists with a great wound in his side," continued Gawain.

At which she caught her breath as if she herself felt the pain of the cruel lance. At that moment, however, the Lord of Astolat appeared, who, having heard Gawain's story, said kindly:

"Stay with us, noble Prince, and give up this tiresome search. The knight whom you seek was here just before the tournament and left his shield with my daughter. Furthermore, my son Lavaine is with him, so that sooner or later we shall surely learn his whereabouts."

Then Gawain, hearing that the mysterious knight's shield was here at Astolat, asked to see it; and when he perceived the familiar azure lions crowned with gold, he cried mockingly:

“Right was the King! Our Launcelot after all!”

To which the maiden smilingly answered:

“And I was right too, for I dreamed that my knight was the greatest of the Round Table.”

“Your knight!” exclaimed Gawain in surprise.

Then the Lily Maid’s cheeks turned rosy-red, and she replied:

“I call him mine because he wore my token—my scarlet sleeve embroidered with pearls.”

At this Gawain perceived that the damsel loved the mighty Launcelot with all her heart; and suspecting, though quite wrongly, that she knew where he was hidden, said to her:

“Fair maiden, let me leave my quest with you; and the diamond also, for, if you love, it will be sweet to give it, and if he love it will be sweet to have it from your own hands, and whether he love or not, a diamond is a diamond. Farewell; perhaps some day we shall meet at court, and learn to know each other better.”

Then, kissing the white hand which received the gem, he leapt on his charger; and, faithless to his trust, carolling a love ballad, lightly rode away.

After which the Maid of Astolat crept to her father’s side, and gently stroking his grey hair said:

“Father, you call me wilful, but the fault is yours for you have always allowed me to have my own way. Now I have come to ask you to let me go in search of Lavaine and of that other to whom I must deliver this diamond, otherwise I should be faithless as that proud prince who left his quest to me.

Long the old man hesitated, but at last he said:

“Yes, you are indeed a wilful child. Yet I myself would like to learn of the knight’s welfare; and besides, as you say, you have the diamond.”

So, having won her suit, the wilful maiden one fair morning, with her brother Torre as a guide, rode toward Camelot before whose mystic gate they met Lavaine. At his sister’s earnest request he led her across the poplar grove to the cave of the hermit upon the rough wall of which she beheld Launcelot’s helmet, with her scarlet sleeve, now cut and torn, streaming from it still. In an inner room lay the great knight himself, gaunt and wasted, scarcely more than the skele-

ton of his former self; so that at the sight a cry of pity burst from Elaine's lips.

Then through many a weary day and wearier night she ministered to him until at last there came a glad hour when the wise hermit told her that her faithful care had saved his life; and all during that time Launcelot reproached himself bitterly because it was impossible for him to repay her with aught but a brother's love.

When he was able to sit in the saddle he rode with Lavaine and the maiden to Astolat to stay until he had regained a little more of his former strength. At last, however, the time came when he felt that he must return to the King's service; and wishing to give as little pain as possible to one to whom he owed so much he reminded Elaine gently of the great difference in their ages, and told her that this love of hers was but the first flash in youth which she would soon forget when her own true knight should appear.

"And if this knight of yours should be poor," he added, "I will endow you with broad land and territory, even to the half of my realm beyond the sea; and in all your quarrels I will be your champion. But more than this I cannot."

While he had been speaking, the Lily Maid, growing paler and paler, had leaned for support against the garden seat. At his last words, she exclaimed:

"Of all this will I have nothing!" Then she fell swooning and was borne away to her chamber in the tower.

It happened, however, that the Lord of Astolat had overheard their conversation; and although he knew that Launcelot's conduct had been blameless, nevertheless he said to him sorrowfully:

"You are too courteous, my Lord; if you would use some roughness before you go, to blunt or break her love, all might yet be well."

To which the chivalrous Launcelot replied:

"That were against me; but what I can do I will."

Accordingly, towards evening, he sent for his shield; then, although he knew by a little clinking sound that Elaine's casement was flung back, and that she was gazing down upon his helmet from which her sleeve was now gone, yet he did not glance up, nor wave his hand, nor bid farewell, but sadly rode away. And this was the one discourtesy that he used.

Then a dark cloud settled down upon the once sunny home at

Astolat; for the Lily Maid, sitting alone in her tower gazing at the case of Launcelot's shield—as empty now as her own life—drooped day by day. And during that time she made a little song which she sang in the evenings to the accompaniment of moaning winds:

“Sweet is true love tho' given in vain, in vain;
And sweet is death who puts an end to pain:
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.

“Love, art thou sweet? then bitter death must be:
Love thou art bitter; sweet is death to me.
Oh, Love, if death be sweeter, let me die.

“Sweet love, that seems not made to fade away;
Sweet death, that seems to make us loveless clay,
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.

“I fain would follow love, if that could be;
I needs must follow death, who calls for me;
Call and I follow, I follow! let me die!”

So her heartbroken father and brothers watched her growing hourly more like the ethereal blossom whose name she bore, until Torre broke out into bitter words against him who had brought all this trouble upon their house. To which the gentle sister replied:

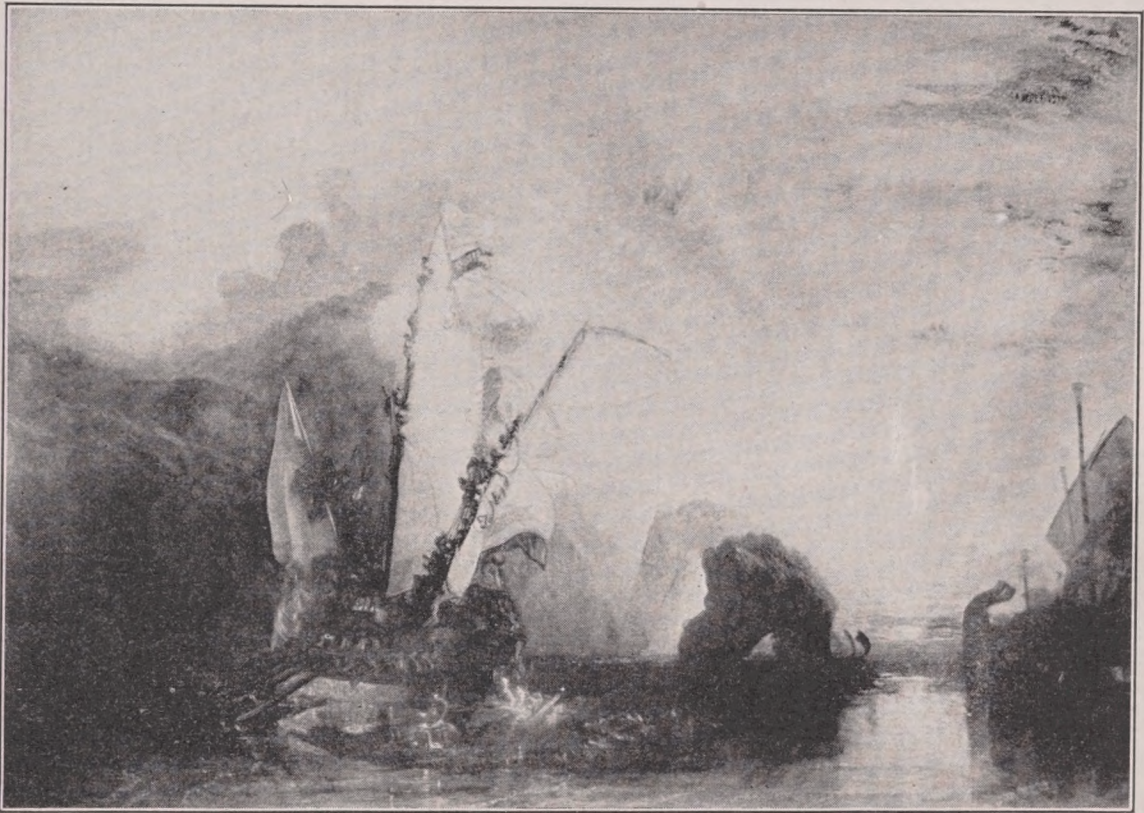
“Brother, it is no more Launcelot's fault not to love me than it is mine to love him as I do. And it is my glory to have loved the greatest, the most stainless, of all King Arthur's knights; so I am not altogether comfortless although my love has no return.”

Then she besought Lavaine to write a letter word for word as she dictated it to him, and when that was done she made her last request:

“Father, a little while before I die, place this letter in my hand, I pray you. Then when the breath has left my body, clothe me in my richest raiment, and deck my bed with coverings as beautiful as the Queen's; then drape our barge like a funeral pall and lay me upon it to be rowed by our old dumb servitor to King Arthur's court. And let us go alone, I beseech you; for none could speak for me so eloquently as my own silent self.”

Her father, able less than ever to deny his wilful child, promised; and eleven days later, with her thin hand holding her precious letter, she closed her eyes for the last time. And that day there was dole in Astolat.

One beautiful morning, therefore, when the blue of the skies was mirrored in the waters of the river that flowed by Camelot, the two



A BLACK BARGE CAME SAILING TOWARD THEM

Seascape, Turner, London

[Courtesy Braun et Cie.]

armed soldiers who guarded the palace door were amazed to behold a black barge come sailing toward them. On this barge, in a shroud of purest white, wrapped to her waist in cloth of gold, bearing in one hand a letter and in the other a fair white lily, with her beautiful face framed in her unbound hair, lay a maiden who seemed to them to be fast asleep. In their wonder they attempted to question the oarsman, but when they found that he would not, or could not, answer, they cried in alarm remembering a prophecy of Merlin's which had been whispered about the court:

“He is enchanted, he cannot speak! And she—look how she sleeps! Surely she is the Fairy Queen who has come to take our King to fairy land.”

But while they babbled thus the King himself appeared, and with him some of his knights who, at his command, reverently lifted the maiden and bore her into the great hall. Presently Gawain came to gaze sadly upon her beautiful face; then Launcelot, in bitter remorse saying to himself:

“Would to God, Elaine, that I had died for thee.”

And last of all the Queen with her maidens. It was Arthur, however, who first discovered the letter in her hand, and who, having broken the seal read aloud:

“Most noble lord, Sir Launcelot of the Lake,
I, sometimes call'd the Maid of Astolat,
Come, for you left me taking no farewell,
Hither, to take my last farewell of you.
I loved you, and my love had no return,
And therefore my true love has been my death.
And therefore to our lady Guinevere,
And to all other ladies I make moan.
Pray for my soul, and yield me burial,
Pray for my soul thou too, Sir Launcelot,
As thou art a knight peerless.”

While he read the ladies of the court wept bitterly; and many, the Queen among them, turned reproachful glances upon the sorrow-stricken Launcelot, who, when he had recovered himself sufficiently to speak, said sadly:

“My liege Lord, and all you that hear, let me tell you how much I grieve for this gentle maiden's death, for she was true and sweet beyond even my old belief in womanhood, and loved me with a love beyond the love of any other woman I have ever known. Yet at my years, however it may be in youth, to be loved does not cause one to love in return. And I swear, my King, by the honor of my knighthood, that I gave her no cause willingly for such affection, as her own father and brothers will testify.”

“Yet, Sir Knight,” interrupted the Queen. “It seems to me that

you might have shown her some little kindness that would have prevented her death."

"Your Majesty," replied Launcelot, "you force me to speak plainly. She would not be content unless I wedded her. That I, who long ago took the King's most holy vow to love one only, could never do. All that I could I offered her; but she would none of it, and so, alas! she died."

Then, at Arthur's command, the pure Sir Percival lifted the maiden and bore her to the richest shrine in all the realm, and with gorgeous obsequies, to the rolling music of the mass, while the King and his court stood around, they lowered her beautiful head into the dust of half-forgotten kings.

Later a costly tomb was raised above her resting place upon which was set her image with a carved lily in her hand and the shield of Launcelot at her feet, while blazoned in letters of gold and azure was the account of her sad voyage for all true hearts to read.

Such is the story of Elaine and the mighty knight Sir Launcelot of the Lake, whose "Honor rooted in dishonor stood, and whose faith unfaithful kept him falsely true;" for when he turned away from the tomb he passed out alone into the night to mourn, and to wrestle with his troubled spirit, "not knowing he should die a holy man."

GLOSSARY 7

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| 1. <i>Azure</i> , a clear blue; the blue of the sky. | 9. <i>Favor</i> , something presented by a lady to her knight to be worn on his helmet at a tournament or in battle. |
| 2. <i>Barrier</i> , the palisades enclosing the ground for a tournament. | 10. <i>Holy Mán</i> , a monk. |
| 3. <i>Blazoned</i> , decorated with heraldic devices. | 11. <i>Obsequies</i> , the burial service. |
| 4. <i>Canopy</i> , a covering suspended over a throne. | 12. <i>Scutcheon</i> , a shield. |
| 5. <i>Charger</i> , a war-horse. | 13. <i>Tilt</i> , a joust between two knights. |
| 6. <i>Diadem</i> , a crown. | 14. <i>Token</i> , same as favor. |
| 7. <i>Dole</i> , grief, mourning, lamentation. | 15. <i>Vintage</i> , wine. |
| 8. <i>Errant Knight</i> , one who roved about in search of adventure. | |

VIII

The Dolorous Stroke

“And there with morning Merlin came,
And on the tomb that told their fame
He wrote by Balan’s Balen’s name,
And gazed thereon, and wept.”

SWINEBURNE’S “Tale of Balen.”

ONCE when Arthur was holding his court at Caerleon, up to the castle gate there rode a messenger from our old acquaintance, King Rience of North Wales. This was the giant, you will remember, from whose clutches Arthur had rescued poor old King Leodogran of Cameliard, thus winning for himself, not only glory, but what was far more precious to him—his beautiful bride Guinevere. Rience, it would appear, had by this time somewhat forgotten the lesson taught him then by Britain’s young overlord, for he was once again worrying about that famous mantle of his whose fringe still lacked the twelfth king’s beard with which the old giant wished to trim it.

So the message now came to Arthur, much as it had come to Leodogran long ago:

“If you do not send me your beard peaceably and of your own accord, I will march against you with a great army and take it and your head along with it. So beware!”

At that threat, however, Arthur and all his knights broke into a merry laugh.

“Tell your master,” said he to the messenger, “that I am not yet old enough to have a beard worth sending, but tell him also that if he wants it, such as it is, he can come and fight for it.”

After which Arthur, having many more important things to think about, completely forgot the matter for a time. Some weeks later, however, when the court had removed to Camelot, Arthur’s

favorite capital—the dim rich city of shadowy palaces—news came that Rience was marching in that direction with his great army of giants, burning and slaying the King's loyal subjects as he came.

Thereupon Arthur sent out the alarm, and there gathered together from far and near all the nobleman of Britain, ever ready at a moment's notice to flock to the standard of their Leige Lord and crush the enemy.

One day, therefore, when this great company of knights was assembled in the King's council-chamber planning the campaign against Rience there suddenly appeared among them a maiden wearing an immense sword.

"Damsel," said Arthur, according to his custom stopping all proceedings to listen to the plea of one in trouble, "why are you thus armed? Are there not brave knights enough in my kingdom to champion the cause of all fair ladies in distress? This is a reproach to me; for did not I promise the Lady of the Lake when she gave me Excalibur that I would make the land so safe that no maiden should ever again need to bear a weapon?"

"Sire" replied the damsel sadly, "I wear this sword because I cannot take it off. It was put on me by enchantment; and I have been told that one of the knights here at your court is the only person in all the world who can ever draw it from its scabbard, and thus set me free from the curse."

"Doubtless, maiden, you have been correctly informed," said Arthur with just a touch of pride in his voice, "for where in all the world are there such knights as mine?"

Then he called his following about him, and told them, beginning at the youngest and least proven, to try in turn this adventure of the sword.

So they came, those stalwart young fellows, and pulled and tugged without success until the maiden said wearily:

"You need not try so hard. He who can draw it at all can draw it easily."

The King, however, was not yet greatly worried; for there still remained his older knights, true and tried, who had not made the attempt. Presently it was Gareth's turn, he who had vanquished Day and Night and Death himself, and he stepped forward, and pulled and tugged—and failed. Then came Geraint who had humbled

the haughty Sparrow-Hawk, and he pulled and tugged—and failed. Then Tristram whose prowess in times past had delivered both Cornwall and Ireland, and he pulled and tugged—and failed.

At this the King turned, still confident, to his dearest friend, the mighty Launcelot before whose lance king, duke, earl, count and baron had ever gone down; and he pulled and tugged—and failed.

Last of all Arthur himself, remembering how, long ago, he had drawn the sword from the anvil, and unwilling that his court should be thus put to shame, made the trial also. So he pulled and tugged—and failed.

“My knights,” said he when all was over, “I greatly fear that this has come to us as a warning that our purposes are no longer as single as in the days of old. Let each man present look to his own heart and life, lest the aim of our noble fellowship be defeated.”

Then a deep hush fell upon them all, and they dared not look into each other’s eyes for shame of this thing that had befallen them. At last the maiden was about to turn hopelessly away when, from a far corner of the hall, there stepped a poorly clad knight known as Balin the Savage. He was not of Arthur’s company; but he had killed a relative of the King’s for which offence he had been thrown into prison until Arthur had learned that all had taken place in a fair fight. Then Arthur, the just, had released the young fellow, who, as it happened, had not yet left the court.

This knight, therefore, after asking permission of his sovereign, bowed low to the maiden and said courteously:

“Fair lady, will you let me try? Perchance this adventure is mine.”

But the damsel, wearied as she was, looked at Balin’s prison-worn garments and answered a trifle scornfully.

“No, pray do not trouble me any more. What can you expect to do when all these good knights have failed?”

“Do not judge me by my outward appearance, gentle maiden,” persisted the youth. Many a brave man has worn poor raiment before now. I pray you, let me try.”

Then, having won her reluctant consent, he took the sword lightly by the hilt and drew it from its scabbard as easily as Arthur had drawn his from the anvil in those brave days of old. After which

he held it up a trifle proudly, and thought that he had never seen so beautiful a weapon before. Presently he said:

“Fair lady, may I keep this sword as a trophy?”

To which the maiden, ashamed of her former conduct toward him who had proved to be her deliverer, was about to consent most willingly when she chanced to look toward Merlin in whose eyes she read a mysterious and gloomy prophecy. She hesitated, therefore, and at last said slowly, speaking as if she were repeating the words of another rather than her own:

“You may have it, Sir Knight, and welcome; but I advise you not to take it, for if you do, it will cause you to do great harm, and with it you will at last slay the man whom you love best in all the world.”

Now this Balin had earned his title “the Savage” because of the good-natured recklessness of his disposition. Hearing this strange prophecy, therefore, he never thought of heeding it, but cried out instead.

“Of that, Damsel, I will take my chances; for my brother Balan is the man whom I love best in all the world, and I certainly will never raise a sword against him.”

Then the maiden yielded and passed from the hall; and Balin would have followed her had not the King called him back.

“Do not go,” said Arthur, “and do not be angry with me because of my mistake in throwing you into prison. Stay with us now, we pray you, and be one of our own number.”

At which invitation the lad’s heart leaped with pride and joy, yet he answered:

“I thank you, Sire, but I beg you to let me first go forth to seek adventure; then, when I have proved myself worthy, I will gladly return, if I may.”

So he departed; and when Arthur found himself alone with Merlin, he turned to the Wise One with a wondering look in his deep blue eyes.

“Can it be, Merlin,” said he, “that this Balin is that greatest knight in all the world who is some day to appear to take his seat in the Siege Perilous?”

“Ah no,” replied the Sage, “the time for him is not ripe. Nevertheless this Balin, wild and careless with his weapons as he sometimes is, is a passing good knight and will do you good service; yet much

harm shall also come through his rashness, and his own life will be short and sad."

Meanwhile Balin, knowing little of these prophecies and caring less, rode on his way rejoicing in his freedom, until he presently met his twin brother Balan who was coming to Arthur's court to plead for the prisoner's release. After the first joy of their meeting, Balan informed his brother that King Rience was at that moment encamped nearby at Castle Terrabil.

"Let us go against him then," cried Balin impulsively. "He is Arthur's enemy; and this is my opportunity for proving myself in the cause of the great White King!"

Balin was willing enough to agree, so he wheeled his horse about and rode with his brother until they met an old man, dressed in black, with a long white beard.

"Knights, where are you going?" inquired this stranger.

To which Balin, the hasty one, replied:

"That we will tell you if you will tell us your name."

"I will not answer your question, but I will answer my own instead," said the aged man. "After which you will be able to answer yours. You are bound for Castle Terrabil in search of Arthur's enemy Rience. But you will gain nothing by your quest unless you ask my advice."

Then both the brothers cried out together:

"Ah! you are Merlin, you are Merlin! Pray forgive us for our rudeness and tell us what we must do!"

So the Wise One led them into the shadows of a deep wood, and told them to sleep there until he should awaken them. This they did, and towards midnight were suddenly aroused by the cry:

"Rience is coming! He is riding through the wood with his soldiers before him! Wait until they have passed, and when the King himself appears you can fall upon and easily take him prisoner."

In fact they had not long to wait, for presently a company of giant knights rode by; then, at just the right moment, Merlin whispered:

"There is Rience! Make your attack!"

Thereupon Balin and Balan rushed forward making such a din and clatter with their arms that the soldiers, hearing this terrible noise at their rear, never stopped to investigate, but thinking that

Arthur's whole army was lying there in ambush, fled for their lives, abandoning their sovereign to his fate.

Thus was Reince captured and brought to the court of his rightful Liege Lord where he did homage most humbly, and was never afterwards known to trouble Arthur again.

Balin, however, felt that he could not rest on the laurels of this one achievement. Parting from his brother, therefore, who seems



“IT WAS A VERY OLD WOODS”*

*Forest Edge, Diaz.

[Courtesy Braun et Cie.]

to have had other work on hand, he rode along by himself until he chanced to meet with a knight and a maiden, both of whom appeared very sad and dejected.

Instantly it occurred to our hero that here might be an opportunity for another adventure. So he said to the knight courteously:

“You seem to be in trouble. Is there any way in which I can help you?”

“Alas! neither you nor any other human being can render me any assistance,” replied the knight with a bitter sigh. “For I have

made an enemy of Garlon, the man who rides invisible, and he may strike me down at any time without the slightest warning."

"But at least I may ride along with you, may I not?" inquired Balin.

"Yes, if you wish," was the hopeless reply.

So the three rode on together, but they had not gone far when suddenly there appeared in the air, seemingly with no hand to guide it, a lance which struck the knight from behind so that he dropped to the ground crying:

"I am killed! Take my horse, Sir Knight, for he is better than yours. Care for this maiden, as you honor your knighthood. Find this traitor who rides invisible, and avenge my death!" And with those words he died.

Then it was Balin's turn to be sad and silent, for brave man though he was, he was filled with horror at the thought that an enemy could steal upon him thus. But presently his anger at the cowardly conduct of this Garlon so flamed within him that he forgot his dread, and vowed, there before the maiden, never to relinquish the quest until he had found and slain the dastardly fellow.

Now this was far more easily said than done, as our rash Balin began to realize as the days went by. He and the maiden, therefore, rode on for a long time hearing nothing of Garlon, although meeting with various other adventures, until one evening they came to the gate of a stately castle of whose lord they begged harborage for the night.

While they were seated at this man's hospitable board, above the music with which their host had sought to entertain them, Balin believed he heard a sound very like a deep groan. As no one else seemed to pay the slightest attention, however, our hero decided that his imagination was playing him some trick. But presently it came again, this time louder than before; and then a third time—a terrible moaning sound as from one in great pain. Then the music and the laughter ceased, while the lord of the castle bowed his head in his hands as if he too were in agony and said:

"That is my son whom you hear. He was wounded by a knight named Garlon who rides invisible, and they tell me that he can never be healed until this cowardly fellow is slain. Alas! I am now too old to start upon such a quest; but I wish I might find some brave man who would undertake it for me."

Then Balin related his story and added:

“Can you tell me where and when I can ever meet this villain face to face?”

“Yes,” replied their host, “for he is the brother of King Pelles who is to give a great feast at his castle within a few days from now. This Garlon will surely be there, and he will be visible, for otherwise



“THE GREAT BANQUET”*

*Hals, Banquet of Guard, Haarlem

[Courtesy Braun et Cie.]

he could partake of neither food nor drink. Any knight can attend this banquet without special invitation providing he brings with him a lady. This fair damsel, therefore, will make you a welcome guest.”

Then Balin rejoiced that at last he was so near the end of this particular adventure. So in the morning he and the maiden set out for the distant castle to which they came on the first day of the feast.

The King’s attendants led our hero into an inner chamber and there disarmed him of all but his precious sword which he begged to be allowed to keep by him. Then he was shown into the great banquet hall, and seated with his maiden at his side.

It was a wonderful gathering of brave knights and fair ladies from all over Britain, so that poor Balin looked about him bewildered,

and began to wonder how he would ever recognize his enemy amid the throng. Presently he said to the man on his right:

“Can you tell me which of these knights is Garlon, the King’s brother?”

“Yes,” replied his neighbor, “there he is yonder, the one with the dark face.”

Then Balin looked steadfastly at the man whom he had sought so long, and said to himself:

“I am but a stranger here, while he is among relatives and friends. If I attack him, they will certainly fall upon me in a body, whereas if I let him go, I may never see him face to face again.”

But while these thoughts were passing through his mind, Garlon perceived the stranger’s gaze fixed upon him; and rising suddenly stepped to his side, and struck him across the face, exclaiming:

“Knaves, why do you stare at me? Eat your meat and do what you came for!”

“So I will!” cried Balin. And with that he drew his sword and cut off Garlon’s wicked head before any one could stop him. Then he turned to his maiden saying:

“Flee! flee for your life; for I have no chance of saving mine. But tell our kind host that his son’s wound will heal now!”

She obeyed, and none too soon, for in another moment the whole company of knights had arisen to throw themselves in a body upon the slayer of their kinsman; but at that instant the voice of the King was heard crying aloud:

“Let no one touch him but me! I alone must avenge my brother’s death!”

With that Pelles grasped his spear and aimed a blow at Balin. Our hero, however, managed to catch the blow on his sword which was thus struck from his hand, and crashed to the ground. Then, finding himself thus defenceless, Balin dashed through the crowd of knights in front of him, and ran from room to room of the old castle hoping somewhere to come across a weapon, while all the time King Pelles followed in swift pursuit.

Now Balin, hasty, impetuous, well-meaning fellow that he was, had not the slightest idea who this new enemy of his might be; but the truth was that he had come to Carbonek, the Castle of the Holy Grail, and that King Pelles was the keeper of the Sacred Chalice.

The Grail, you must know, was the mystic Cup from which Jesus our Saviour drank with his disciples at the Last Supper; and also the Vessel in which Joseph of Arimathaea caught the drops of blood when our suffering Lord hung upon the cross. Since that time it had possessed miraculous powers, for the blood had remained in it ever after, endowing it with a mysterious life of its own, the nature of which no mortal man could understand. One of these powers was that it could give food and drink to whomsoever it chose, so that one thus fed by it knew neither hunger nor thirst for earthly things ever again.

Thus it had happened that Joseph, who had given Jesus burial in his own rock-hewn sepulchre "wherein was never man yet laid," was afterwards thrown into prison and fed there for many years so that his jailers were mystified. Afterwards, when he was at last released, he came to Britain bearing the sacred Chalice with him, and by it he had been kept alive here in Carbonek Castle awaiting the coming of that best knight in all the world before whose arrival it had been prophesied he should not see death.

Balin had, of course, heard of Joseph and of the Holy Grail, but he had never hoped to see either, for the world, before the coming of Arthur, had grown so wicked that these Wonderful Things, once visible to all, had been withdrawn from mortal eyes; and even the knights who came and went freely about Carbonek Castle knew nothing about a certain room which could be reached only by a secret passage.

It chanced, however, that Balin in his mad flight before the infuriated monarch touched a hidden spring which caused the door to this mysterious passage to swing back. Down this corridor he dashed until he found himself upon the threshold of a room hung with richest tapestries, and lighted by a soft red glow, proceeding he could not have told from where, though it was like the light of neither sun nor moon nor candles. The whole atmosphere of this apartment was so strange and awe-inspiring that probably anyone save this rash Balin the Savage would have paused reverently before entering.

Upon a magnificent bed in a far corner lay an old, old man with a beard as white as the driven snow. He seemed as peaceful as if he were dead, yet there was the color of life upon his cheeks and his

lips were tinted. Near his side stood a table of solid gold and silver wrought together in weird and beautiful patterns, and on this table lay a spear from whose point there fell from time to time a drop of blood. Where the blood touched it, the table shone with a mysterious glory.

Afterwards Balin remembered all these things, but at the moment his one thought was of the weapon of which he stood in such great need. In an instant he had grasped it and turned fiercely upon King Pelles who was now close behind him. One moment more and the King had dropped to the ground senseless with a deep, gaping wound in his side.

But as he fell Balin felt the floor rocking beneath him. Presently he let slip the spear which seemed to burn his hand. He looked about him terror stricken and perceived that the walls were shaking and moving. Then a great din of crashing and splitting struck his ears, and at last the floor itself began to give way beneath him, while a burst of light streamed in from the roof as it opened and fell apart. At last the thick stone walls tottered and toppled, then with a mighty roar and crash the whole castle collapsed into a formless heap of ruins.

For three days after that Balin knew no more. Then, as he was returning painfully to consciousness, he heard a voice which he recognized as Merlin's gently calling his name.

"Balin," it said, "wake up! It is time for you to leave this place. See, I have brought you a horse, and here is your sword which I rescued for you from the ruins."

But poor Balin was stiff and sore, and would much have preferred to be let alone, until Merlin said to him sternly:

"Balin, Balin the Savage, do you know what you have done?"

"I have killed a cowardly murderer who rode invisible," replied our hero.

"Yes, but you have done more than that," continued the Sage. "The old man who lay in that bed was the saintly Joseph of Arimathea, and King Pelles is his descendant and the present keeper of the Grail; while that spear with which you wounded the King's side was the very one the Roman soldier used when he pierced the heart of our Saviour on the cross."

"And Joseph and King Pelles," whispered Balin in an awed voice, "are they—dead?"

“No,” replied Merlin, “for it was not in your power to kill them; but the king can never be healed of that terrible wound which you gave him until the coming of the best knight in all the world. It was because you struck with that sacred spear that the castle fell; and by that same Dolorous Stroke the whole land for miles about is laid waste, and must remain desolate until the coming of that knight of whom I spoke.”

Then Merlin vanished, and Balin, sick at heart, rode on his dreary way alone. For three days he followed a lane through fields where nothing grew and through gardens whose flowers hung old and faded on their stalks, until at last he came to a cross whereon was written in letters of gold, “Let no knight ride alone to this castle.” Balin, however, was too weary of his own life to heed any warning, and continued on his way until he came to the castle in question where he was greeted heartily by a great company of knights and ladies.

The chief lady of the castle, however, said to him:

“Stranger, there is a certain knight here who keeps an island, and no man may pass thereby unless he joust with him.”

“That is a bad custom,” replied Balin, “nevertheless I am willing.”

So they provided him with a shield; then he and his horse were put upon a barge and sailed away to the farther side of a beautiful lake. There Balin disembarked and rode forward until he beheld coming toward him a mighty knight clothed all in fiery red. In a moment both had set their spears in rest and crashed together so that each was thrown from his horse. Then they arose and began to fight with their swords, and it seemed to Balin that never before had he encountered such prowess. At last he became angered at the thought that anyone should thus stand against him, and lashed with such fury that presently the valiant red knight sank to the ground, crying:

“I yield! You have vanquished me, and I cannot live with the wounds which I have received; but I do not care for that, for I have kept the custom of the castle as I promised!”

To which Balin replied:

“Sir Knight, you have killed me too. Tell me who you are, for never before have I met with such a valiant man of arms!”

Then the stranger answered huskily:

“My name is Balan, brother to Balin, one of the best knights in all the world. Him I know you could never have overthrown.”

At this Balin, wounded though he was, crept to his brother's side, and raising his vizor, cried bitterly:

“Alas! the fateful prophecy was true! I have done great mischief, and with this sword I have slain the man whom I love best in all the world!”

Then, not long after, having comforted each other in their last moments, the two ill-fated brothers breathed their last.

The following morning Merlin came to perform the burial rites. After which he took Balin's accursed sword and put upon it a new hilt rich in gold and jewels, and bearing an inscription written in weird characters. Then he said to himself:

“It shall yet serve in a holy cause.”

And with that he drove the weapon into a great block of red marble which he threw into the lake upon whose placid bosom it floated like a piece of wood for many a year until at last it drifted down to Camelot which mystic city it reached on the self-same day when the best knight in all the world arrived there to take his place in the Siege Perilous.

GLOSSARY 8

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| 1. <i>Barge</i> , a boat. | 9. <i>Lance</i> , a long shaft with a spear-head. |
| 2. <i>Chalice</i> , a consecrated cup. | 10. <i>Overlord</i> , same as liege lord. |
| 3. <i>Champion</i> , to act as the defender of another's cause. | 11. <i>Prowess</i> , bravery. |
| 4. <i>Dastardly</i> , cowardly. | 12. <i>Quest</i> , a search. |
| 5. <i>Dolorous</i> , causing sorrow or pain. | 13. <i>Siege</i> , a seat. |
| 6. <i>Grail</i> , a consecrated cup. | 14. <i>Standard</i> , a flag or banner. |
| 7. <i>Homage</i> , the ceremony of professing fealty and promising service. | 15. <i>Trophy</i> , anything taken from an enemy and treasured as a proof of victory. |
| 8. <i>Liege Lord</i> , an overlord, one who held authority over other lords. | 16. <i>Vizor</i> , the front piece of a helmet. |

IX

The Coming of Galahad

“My good blade carves the casques of men,
My tough lance thrusteth sure,
My strength is as the strength of ten,
Because my heart is pure.”

TENNYSON'S "Sir Galahad."

AGAIN the Pentecostal time was drawing near, and Arthur had decided to keep the Feast on this occasion at Camelot instead of at Caerleon, according to his usual custom.

For many days beforehand, from north and south and east and west such of the knights as had been able to achieve their quests had come riding into the city, anxious to take part in that most famous gathering of all the year which commemorated the day of their Sovereign's birth as well as his coronation day; so that on the eve of the great Feast a discovery was made of something which had never been known to occur before since the founding of the Round Table—every one of the one hundred and forty-nine knights of the Order was in his place, and the Siege Perilous alone still stood empty.

While that goodly company, the flower of Britain's manhood, sat thus circled about their King and Queen rejoicing in the unusual event, a maiden was ushered into the great hall and led courteously by one of the knights to the foot of the throne. There, after having made obeisance to her Sovereigns, she asked the question that had come from the lips of so many damsels in distress:

“Your Majesty, can you tell me if the great Sir Launcelot is here?”

“That is Sir Launcelot,” replied the King with an inclination of his head toward him who sat in the third seat from the mystic Siege Perilous.

“Sir Launcelot,” said the maiden, stepping up to the court favorite who had risen to meet her. “I am sent to you by King

Pelles—he who years ago received the Dolorous Stroke. He requests that, without asking any questions, you ride with me to an abbey in a forest not very far from here.”

“I will go most willingly, maiden,” replied Launcelot, “if the King permits.”

Arthur was about to give his consent when the Queen interrupted him saying:

“My Lord, to-morrow is our great Feast day, and for once, perhaps for the last time, who knows, we are all together. May not Sir Launcelot delay this quest for twenty-four hours?”

At this it was the maiden’s turn to interrupt.

“Your Majesty,” said she addressing Guinevere, “let him come with me now, and I promise you that he shall be back before noon to-morrow.”

So Launcelot armed himself for the mysterious quest, and followed the damsel along devious paths until they reached the heart of a deep forest where there stood an old abbey. As the gates swung open at their approach, there issued from one of the side doors twelve holy nuns clad in spotless white raiment, one of whom was leading a young man, scarcely more than a boy in years, yet marvelously tall and stalwart-looking.

“Sir,” said the gentle sister to Launcelot, “this young squire is the grandson of King Pelles, who, however, has not seen him since his childhood, for he was early left to our care. He is strong and brave and noble, and has been taught all that a prince should know. It is time, therefore, that he be made a knight, so at his own request we have sent for the greatest member of Arthur’s Round Table to confer that honor upon him.”

Then Launcelot turned his gaze upon the youth and thought that he had never seen so wonderful a face, for besides its manly beauty it showed courage and hope and the rich flush and glow of a great inspiration which caused the mighty knight’s heart to contract with sudden pain as the memory of his own lost youth rose up before him. Then a strange feeling took possession of him, and he seemed to hear a voice whispering in his ear, “He has come! He has come!” But all he could trust himself to say aloud was:

“Then let him watch his arms in your chapel to-night, and in the morning he shall receive the order of knighthood.”



“THE GOOD
SISTERS
RANGED
THEMSELVES
ABOUT THE
ALTAR”*

*The Singing Angels,
Van Dyck

Royal Museum,
Berlin

So it was done, and while the others slept the young man kept his holy vigil praying that he might ever remain true to his vows. With the first flush of dawn came the good sisters, filing in one by one, bearing lighted tapers, and ranged themselves about the altar. And last of all came Launcelot, who fastened the lad's golden spurs, after which he gave him three strokes with the flat of his sword, saying reverently:

“May God make you as brave and true as you are good to look upon.”

Then, when the ceremony was at an end Launcelot turned to the new knight and inquired:

“Will you now ride with me to Camelot to pay homage to the King?”

But the youth answered:

“Not yet, Sir Knight, for the time has not come for me to go to court. Nevertheless I shall join you there before very long.”

So Launcelot, pondering these things in his heart, returned alone; and arrived, as the maiden had promised, in ample time for the Feast which was set for high noon.

Then began that day of days, the most marvelous of all the great White King's reign.

As Launcelot rode in he found the knights assembled in the throne room, according to their time-honored custom awaiting the report of that unusual occurrence which would permit the Feast to begin. Scarcely had he taken his place among them when a squire appeared before the King saying:

“Sire, down by the river I have seen a wonderful sight indeed—a block of red marble, in which is sticking a sword with a hilt of curious workmanship, floating on the water like a piece of common wood!”

“That is truly a marvel!” exclaimed Arthur, “and one well worth our going to see.”

Accordingly the King and Queen with all the knights and ladies of the court filed down to the river's brink, where they beheld, just as the squire had said, an immense block of red marble, with a sword sticking in it, floating on the waves. They stood there watching it for a while until presently it was cast ashore at Arthur's feet. Then the King espied an inscription written in weird letters which twined

in and out among the jewels of the hilt, and proceeded to read it aloud:

“NEVER SHALL MAN TAKE ME HENCE, BUT ONLY HE BY WHOM I OUGHT TO HANG, AND HE SHALL BE THE BEST KNIGHT OF THE WORLD.”

For a moment there was silence, then Arthur turned to Launcelot, saying:

“This sword ought to be yours, my friend; for where in all the world is there a better knight than you?”

But Launcelot, remembering his adventure of the morning, and looking down into the depths of his own tempest-tossed soul, shook his head and answered humbly:

“Sire, I know full well that this weapon is not for such as I, therefore I will not set my hand to it. Moreover I advise no other knight here present to attempt to draw it lest he receive a deadly wound.”

So the whole company turned back toward the hall, questioning among themselves what these strange things might mean, and there awaited them the second wonder; for as each man prepared to take his rightful place about the mystic Table he noticed a new lustre proceeding from that empty seat which was known as the Siege Perilous. Presently each became aware of the fact that the old inscription was gone from the back of the Siege and that a new one had taken its place bearing these words:

“FOUR HUNDRED WINTERS AND FIFTY-FOUR ACCOMPLISHED AFTER THE PASSION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST OUGHT THIS SIEGE TO BE FULFILLED.”

Then Launcelot, thinking of the lad whom he had knighted that morning in the forest, turned pale, and exclaimed in an awed voice:

“Sire, according to that count the Siege should be filled this very day, for this is the Feast of Pentecost after the four hundred and fifty-fourth year. And if it please you I should like to cover these letters that none may behold them till the coming of him who shall achieve the adventure.”

Then, having received the King's permission, he took a cloth

of purest white silk and reverently laid it upon the chair, thus veiling it from the curious eyes.

After that, with a strange, tense feeling of something impending, the knights were about to turn their attention to the banquet so long delayed by excess of marvels, when the third wonder of the day presented itself:

Suddenly all the doors and windows of the palace shut of their own accord, yet the hall was not greatly darkened. Then there appeared in their midst the figure of what seemed to be an old man although he was cloaked and hooded in raiment of dazzling whiteness, so that no one could see his face; and with him was a young knight in flame-colored armor by whose side hung an empty scabbard, for he bore neither sword nor shield.

In an instant Launcelot recognized the youth whom he had knighted that morning; and he was, therefore, not surprised to see their mysterious guest lead him to the foot of the throne and raise his hand in blessing, saying:

“Peace be with you, knights of the Round Table!” Then addressing the King:

“Sire, I bring you here a young knight that is of royal lineage and of the family of Joseph of Arimathaea. By him shall the marvels of this court be fully accomplished, for the world has been awaiting his coming these many years!”

Then the aged man, who was none other than Joseph of Arimathaea himself, caused the youth to lay aside his armor, and threw upon his shoulders a scarlet mantle trimmed with richest ermine; after which, saying, “Follow me,” he led him to the Siege Perilous. And as the young man stood there, with a strange, rapt look upon his face as if he had a vision of things to which the rest were blinded, Launcelot’s covering of white silk was raised by an invisible hand so that all present might read the inscription which was now changed for the second time that day:

“THIS IS THE SEAT OF GALAHAD, THE BEST KNIGHT IN ALL THE WORLD.”

An awed hush fell upon the company, while the youth stood before his rightful place with lowered eyes. Suddenly all became aware of the fact that the saintly Joseph had vanished as myste-

riously as he had appeared. Then Arthur recovered himself sufficiently to speak:

“Sir Galahad,” said he, “you are indeed welcome to a place that has stood vacant awaiting your coming for so many, many years. Yet before you take your seat we should like to see you achieve another adventure. Will you come with me to the river’s brink?”

So the King led the way with the whole court following, and when they stood at the water’s edge, he said gravely:

“Try, Sir Galahad, if you can draw that sword from the marble, for then we shall know beyond all question that you are that best knight in all the world.”

“See, your Majesty,” replied the youth still with becoming modesty, “I have no sword with me, only this empty scabbard; for I knew that I should find my weapon here, as I shall later find my shield.”

Then he laid his hand on the bejewelled hilt and lightly drew the whole from its stony sheath, after which he placed it in his own scabbard, saying:

“That sword has done great mischief, for it was the cause of the Dolorous Stroke, and furthermore it was the fateful weapon with which a good man slew his brother. I pray, therefore, that I may be able to do enough good with it to wipe out the curse.”

Yes, truly, there was no doubt of it now; the best knight of all the world was indeed among them at last! Yet the King’s face was sad as he led the way back, for he had a strange premonition that the days of his Round Table were drawing to a close, and there is always sadness in finality even though it be the finality of fulfillment.

When they regained the hall, Galahad knelt to take upon himself that great vow of the Order “as is a shame a man should not be bound by, yet the which no man yet had been fully able to keep”:

“To reverence the King as if he were
Their conscience, and their conscience as their King,
To break the heathen and uphold the Christ,
To ride abroad redressing human wrongs,
To speak no slander, no, nor listen to it,

To honor his own word as if his God's,
To lead sweet lives in purest chastity,
To love one maiden only, cleave to her,
And worship her by years of noble deeds,
Until they won her."

And as the words fell from his lips there was a light upon his face which brought back to Arthur's mind the day when Launcelot, in the first flush of his young manhood, had sworn that same oath while all had believed that he would prove to be that one perfect knight without fear and without reproach.

Presently Galahad arose from his knees; then, while all present held their breath, he turned and quietly and reverently took his seat in the wondrous Siege Perilous. Thus at last, for the first time since Merlin had made it for Arthur's royal father, Uther Pendragon, every one of the hundred and fifty seats of the mystic Round Table was occupied!

And then—

Suddenly the great hall grew dark, and there came a sound of cracking and riving and rending of the roof, with a mighty blast of thunder overhead. Then into the blackness, through an upper window there stole one broad gleam of dazzling sunlight, seven times more clear than the ordinary light of day. Presently, down the beam there slowly glided a soft red glow moving toward the Siege which Galahad filled. None present, save one only, could see distinctly what it was, for although its general shape was that of a Goblet, yet it was covered with soft white silk, and seemed furthermore to be enshrouded in a sort of luminous cloud through which its resplendence shone, filling the room with its glory. It moved on as if some unseen hand were guiding it until at last it rested in a blaze of splendor above the Siege Perilous, and in that light each man beheld his brother not as he really was, but as he had prayed and longed and striven all his life to become. Not more than a moment did it remain, then it passed, leaving but the red glow behind, which in its turn presently faded into the light of common day.

One, two, three minutes went by, and still the awed silence remained unbroken, for all realized that the Holy Thing which had

passed was none other than the mystic Grail. Presently Gawain, he who had once been faithless in the King's quest, arose and holding his sword aloft with the cross-shaped hilt upward instead of the point, cried aloud:

"Sire, I know not how it may have been with the others, but as for me, I did not see the Sacred Cup plainly. Therefore I make this vow: To leave this goodly fellowship and to seek the Grail for a year and a day. At the end of that time, if I have not found it, I will return believing that the achievement of this Quest is not for me."

Then in a moment every sword in the room was raised, not in the old way, but as Gawain had held his—cross-shaped hilt upward; while instead of the usual simultaneous cry, each man began to make the vow separately to seek the Sacred Chalice until he should see it in open vision. After a while all had sworn save only the new knight in the flame-colored robe.

So Arthur turned to him saying wonderingly:

"Sir Knight, did you see plainly the Holy Grail?"

To which the youth replied:

"Sire, I saw it, and a heavenly host as well which filled the hall. Furthermore I heard a voice crying: 'Galahad, Galahad, follow me!' Therefore I now swear to pursue this Quest, not only for a year and a day, but for my whole life if need be, until I achieve once again the perfect vision."

Then the King bowed his head, exclaiming:

"Ah! Galahad, Galahad! This Quest is indeed for such as you whose strength is as the strength of ten because your heart is pure!" Then turning to his other knights, he added sadly:

"But you, Oh my friends, have you thought that you may thus be forsaking your plain duty to follow, not a great light such as Galahad's, but a wandering fire which will lead you at last into the quagmire? I, your King, may not go upon this Quest, for God has given me my kingdom to rule, therefore my place is here. Yet how crippled shall my work be henceforth; for when the cries of this great land pass through this hall, your places will be vacant, and there will be none to send out to right the wrongs of the weak and the oppressed.

"Nevertheless, now that they are made, your vows are sacred,

and perchance you may become better men by seeking even that which you are destined never to find. Go therefore, but before you depart let us have one more tournament on the old tilting-ground that once again I may see the yet unbroken strength of all my knights."

So when the next morning came the famous old field of combat was thronged with spectators more eager than ever before to hear the sounding of the trumpets, for a rumor had already spread abroad concerning the wonders of the preceding day.

The King and the Queen sat together beneath the royal canopy, and looked down upon their knights with faces where pride and pain strove for mastery; for never before had Camelot seen so many brave deeds done, so many lances broken in a tourney.

No man was there in the field that day who failed to do himself credit, yet wherever Arthur and Guinevere looked they seemed to see only the glow of Galahad's flame-colored mail and the flash of his burnished arms. Never once did his horse falter, never once did his spear fail; and though he bore no shield, every lance that touched his armor was instantly shattered. They noticed, however, that while every knight against whom he charged went down, he never came near Launcelot or Bors or Percival, so that they too did nobly in the tournament.

When all was over the King called the young hero to his side, and looking long into his eyes said in a voice which trembled slightly: "Galahad, I have seen this day the best that a knight can do!"

But the end came at last. Early the following morning with prancing chargers, flying banners, waving plumes and glittering arms that 'glorious company, the flower of men' rode to Camelot's great cathedral where they knelt to receive the blessing of the Archbishop on the Quest. After which the King ordered the roll to be called, and it was found that not one was missing—a hundred and fifty men in all—every knight of the Round Table!

So they remounted their horses and rode on through the dim, rich city between long lines of people who were weeping silently, for they seemed to realize, as did Arthur and Guinevere, that many of them were riding to their doom. Presently they passed through the gate where the White King's wars were rendered mystically, and out to the broad highway.

For a while the King and Queen, gazing upon the disappearing host from the battlements of the castle, could distinguish here a shield and there a banner, and would whisper to each other:

“See! that is Launcelot’s, and that is Bors’, and that is Percival’s!”

While every now and then a flash of scarlet caused them to exclaim:

“Ah! that was Galahad!”

But before long they could see only a bright spot in the road where the morning sunlight glanced upon the burnished arms, and



“THE FAMOUS OLD FIELD OF COMBAT WAS THROGGED WITH SPECTATORS”

Detail from *Pilgrims to Canterbury*, Stothard, London National Gallery [Courtesy Braun et Cie]

presently even that grew smaller and smaller, until at last a mist that had arisen before their own eyes blotted it forever from their sight.

Such was the passing of the Round Table to the lingering gaze of its founder—like the setting of a star.

GLOSSARY 9

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| 1. <i>Abbey</i> , a convent, the dwelling place of an abbess. | 7. <i>Lineage</i> , family. |
| 2. <i>Canopy</i> , a covering suspended over a throne. | 8. <i>Obeisance</i> , a bow. |
| 3. <i>Chalice</i> , a consecrated cup. | 9. <i>Quagmire</i> , soft, marshy ground that yields under the foot; a bog. |
| 4. <i>Charger</i> , a war-horse. | 10. <i>Scabbard</i> , the sheath of a sword. |
| 5. <i>Devious</i> , winding. | 11. <i>Siege</i> , a seat. |
| 6. <i>Grail</i> , a consecrated cup. | 12. <i>Taper</i> , a candle. |
| | 13. <i>Vigil</i> , a night watch. |

X

The Quest of the Holy Grail

“ ‘O, yet methought I saw the Holy Grail,
All pall’d in crimson samite,

but what I saw was veil’d
And cover’d; and this quest was not for me.’ ”

TENNYSON’S “Holy Grail.”

WELL-NIGH impossible would it be to follow the exploits of all the hundred and fifty brave men who set out from Camelot that sad yet glorious morning in Quest of the Holy Grail. Therefore we must content ourselves with relating some of the marvelous adventures of the three whose seats had been nearest to the Siege Perilous—Launcelot, Bors, and Percival the Pure.

THE ADVENTURES OF SIR LAUNCELOT

All that first day the knights rode together until, towards evening, they came to a place where four roads met, in the centre of which stood a double cross whose arms thus pointed north and south and east and west. There the company broke up, each riding in the direction toward which he believed himself called; so it happened that, when darkness overtook him, Launcelot, whose seat had been third from the mystic Siege, found himself alone in a strange land.

Now, although he believed that, in times past, he had travelled all over the island of Britain, he had never come across so wild and desolate a region before. There were no highways, and scarcely any paths that he might follow. Only here and there did he meet a human being; but the wild beasts of the forest often crossed his

track, so that his deeds of prowess took the form of defending himself against their attacks rather than that of tilting with mailed knights.

So he rode for many days, sleeping at night beneath such shelter as he could find in the mouldy ruins of some old castle through the chinks in whose walls the fierce eyes of famished beasts of prey frequently glared at him.

One night, however, he chanced to come across a stone cross which stood by an ancient chapel. Having tied his horse to a tree, he looked in through the door and saw that all was in a ruined and wasted condition save for an altar richly decked in white samite upon which there stood a silver candlestick bearing six lights. Being weary with his journey, however, he made no attempt to enter, but unlaced his helmet, ungirded his sword, and lay down to sleep upon his shield at the foot of the cross.

And as he slept he dreamed that he saw drive up two white palfreys bearing a litter upon which lay a wounded knight. Then the chapel door seemed to open, and the candlestick with its six lighted tapers was borne by invisible hands to the other side of the cross. Presently there appeared in the same mysterious manner a table of gold and silver upon which was set the Holy Grail itself! Yet even in his dream Launcelot could not see it plainly, for it was still covered with white silk and enshrouded in that same luminous cloud which had veiled it from his eyes at Camelot. The wounded Knight seemed to be aware of its presence too, for he suddenly sat up raising his arms toward the Sacred Chalice and cried aloud:

“Have mercy, Lord, and grant that I be made whole!”

Then he crept slowly and painfully on hands and knees until he was able to touch the Grail, whereupon he immediately leaped up joyfully exclaiming:

“Lord, I thank thee, for now at last I am whole indeed, and cleansed of all my sin!”

Hearing the man's last words, Launcelot, who was sick in soul if not in body, tried with all his might to rise that he likewise might lay his hand upon the Holy Thing; but he found that, struggle as he would, he could move neither hand nor foot. Then suddenly knight and candlestick and table and Grail vanished from his sight and he awoke to hear a voice still ringing in his ears which said:

“Launcelot! Launcelot! Withdraw yourself from this sacred place, for you are unworthy!”

So he departed sad at heart, remembering the King's warning, and saying bitterly to himself:

“Alas! this Quest is not for such as I!”

After a while he came to a wild forest on the side of a lofty mountain where he found a hermitage of whose occupant he begged shelter for the night. As the two talked together over their frugal fare, Launcelot felt moved to unburden his heart to the holy man, who said to him gravely when he had heard all:

“Sir Launcelot of the Lake, you have won honor and glory so that you have come to be known far and wide as the mightiest knight of Arthur's Round Table. But you are proud, and often your great feats have been performed not for God and his righteousness only, but more for the plaudits of men, and the praise of the King and the admiration of the beautiful Guinevere; therefore the open vision of the Grail is not for you. To three men only will it be given to see it plainly; but of all the others who ride upon this Quest you will come nearest to it, for you have been tempted as few are tempted, and you have striven with your own heart as few have been called upon to strive. Farewell, go in peace and sin no more!”

So Launcelot set out again a trifle comforted, and when the evening shadows were descending upon him once more he found himself in a deep wood through the gloom of which he presently dimly perceived the form of a knight coming toward him on horseback.

“Sir Knight,” he cried out joyfully when the man was within speaking distance, “I pray you to try a joust with me, for I have fought with none but wild beasts for so long that I have almost forgotten knightly ways.”

The stranger made no reply, but set his lance in rest. Then both spurred their horses and crashed together so that Launcelot's spear struck full upon the shield of his opponent and was instantly broken to splinters. Another moment and our hero was hurled from the back of his charger and lay upon the ground. Thus was the mighty Launcelot, the glory of King Arthur's court, thrown by the first knight whom he chanced to meet in the Quest!

Instantly, however, he was on his feet again; yet he did not

draw his sword, as he would most assuredly have done in other days, but bowed his head before his conqueror saying humbly:

“I know who you are, Sir Knight; for I have jousted with the best knights of Britain and would recognize the stroke of each. Neither Gareth, nor Geraint, nor Tristram could have thrown me. Therefore I know that you are Galahad!”

Then Galahad put up his sword crying joyfully:

“Ah! Launcelot, Launcelot, the man to whom I owe my knighthood! How glad I am of this meeting!”

Long these two talked together—of the court which now seemed like some far off dream of the past, and of the achieving of the Quest which was no less a distant dream of the future. Then at last Launcelot said:

“Galahad, may I fare with you henceforth, for I am certain that you will some day see the Holy Grail?”

But Galahad answered sadly:

“Alas! my Launcelot, that cannot be, for I am permitted to take no one with me as yet.”

And with that he grasped the older knight's hand in farewell, and mounting his horse was soon lost to sight amid the shadows of the wood. Yet for many moments after his departure it seemed to Launcelot that there lingered a gleaming trail of light where his flame-colored armor had passed by.

Presently, feeling no need of rest, Launcelot too mounted his charger to follow the road along which Galahad had preceded him; and so, in the course of time, as the morning sun shot up from underground, he found that he had reached the sea.

There, floating gently upon the waves he saw a little ship which lay so close to the rocks that he could easily step on board, as an



“A KNIGHT COMING TOWARD HIM ON HORSEBACK”

Equestrian Portrait Charles I, Van Dyck, Prado, Madrid
[Courtesy Braun et Cie]

inner voice seemed to be counselling him to do. No sooner had he placed his foot upon the deck, however, than the little craft, by the aid of neither sail nor oar, left its moorings and was soon adrift upon the high seas.

Then a feeling of strange peace came over his troubled spirit, and the weariness of all his sleepless nights enveloped him; so that presently his eyes closed and he did not awaken until the sudden cessation of the rocking motion that had lulled him caused him to realize that his vessel had reached its port.

A full moon riding high in the cloudless heavens revealed to him by its weird light the outlines of a castle with a high tower and many turrets and battlements standing near the shore. Still impelled by the commands of that inner voice he disembarked and walked up to the gate which, as he now perceived, was guarded by two immense lions. Instinctively he drew his sword; but no sooner had he done so than it was wrenched from his hand by a small black dwarf who at that moment stepped out from among the shadows.

“Proud Knight,” said he, “why do you trust to the strength of your arm rather than to the goodness of your Maker?”

Then he returned the weapon to Launcelot who now pointed it towards the lions cross-shaped hilt forward, whereupon the beasts made no further effort to impede his progress.

So he passed on into the fortress through many doors which opened at his approach until at last he came to one that remained fast closed. He tried the handle, but it refused to turn; and as he hesitated, uncertain what to do next, he heard the sound of soft music on the other side. So like the singing of some heavenly choir were those strains that Launcelot felt impelled to kneel humbly before that fast-closed portal. As he did so the sound grew louder, and presently the door swung slowly back upon its hinges.

Reverently he raised his eyes and beheld in the centre of a great room a table of gold and silver inlaid in weird patterns upon which, still with its covering of white silk, but with no cloud about it now, stood the long-sought Holy Grail! Ten times brighter did its mystic glow appear to the weary seeker than when he had first seen it in the old hall at Camelot, or even than it had seemed to him in his dream by the cross.

As he continued to gaze in mute wonder, a figure cloaked and

hooded in apparel of stainless white stepped forward, and lifting the Sacred Chalice with both hands, raised it far above his head in adoration. Whereupon Launcelot, with the one idea of coming nearer to the Holy Thing, arose from his knees intending to enter the room.

Suddenly, however, it seemed to him that a blast like a fiery breath struck him in the face, and the burning air was all about him and through him, so that he fell to the ground, having lost the power of motion. Then he felt no more pain, yet he was aware of the fact that he was being carried away to another room where he was laid tenderly upon a soft white bed; and there he remained unconscious for twenty-four days—one day for each year that he had failed in perfect fidelity to the vows of his knighthood.

At the end of that time he awoke one morning able to answer the questions of the kind people of the Castle.

“I am Launcelot of the Lake,” said he, “and I seek the Holy Grail.”

“This is Carbonek, the Castle of the Grail,” they replied, “which was rebuilt by unseen hands after its terrible fall when Balin the Savage gave its master the Dolorous Stroke. You have done nobly, Sir Launcelot, but now you must return to King Arthur’s court, for the open vision is not for you, and you will never see more of the Sacred Vessel than you have seen already.”

Then Launcelot took ship again, and sailed away toward distant Camelot where he arrived in time—a humbler and a wiser man.

THE ADVENTURES OF SIR BORS

When the knights parted at the cross-roads, Bors whose seat had been second from the mystic Siege rode on alone for some days without meeting with any adventure which a brave man, such as he, would have considered worth relating. One evening, however, he, too, reached a hermitage where he was made welcome at the humble board, the fare of which consisted of dry bread and sparkling water from a mountain spring.

As he and his kind host talked together, Bors was moved as Launcelot had been to tell the hermit the story of the Quest. When he had finished the good man said gravely:

“Sir Knight, do you know that all the powers of evil are leagued

together against the men who seek the Grail? And do you realize that only they who triumph over all temptations shall achieve the open vision?"

"Yes," said Bors, "all this I know very well."

"Then will you make me a promise?" inquired the hermit.

"If it be one that I can keep," said Bors.

"Promise me," continued the good man, "that you will eat nothing but dry bread and drink nothing but pure water until you achieve the Quest."

Then Bors hesitated.

"But, Friend," said he, "it may well be that I am destined never to see the Grail at all. Then would you have me live the rest of my life upon such simple fare?"

"I know," replied the hermit mysteriously, "that you will see it if you never allow yourself to be turned from the Quest through any fear, or for any pleasure or gain."

Then the light of hope kindled in the young man's eyes, and he exclaimed joyfully:

"Kind Friend, I promise!"

So in the morning he bid farewell to his host and rode on his way through the forest until he chanced to meet with two great, rough-looking knights who were leading a third as their prisoner. As they drew nearer Bors perceived that the unfortunate man, whom they had bound upon his horse and were beating with thorns, was none other than his own brother Lionel.

Instantly he had drawn his sword ready to fly to the rescue, and was about to fall upon the men when suddenly, from out the thicket on the farther side of the road dashed a woman, neither young nor beautiful, who, as he soon discovered, was fleeing for her life from a band of robbers.

For an instant Bors hesitated, in doubt whether his duty lay in the direction of rescuing his brother whom he dearly loved or of saving this woman who was nothing to him. Then his chivalrous training in Arthur's halls came to his aid, and he remembered that Lionel too was a knight bound, like himself, to suffer whatsoever came to him in the righting of wrongs, and in the championing of the cause of the weak and the oppressed. He turned, therefore, fiercely upon the robbers who presently fled in dismay, so that he was able to

deliver the woman in safety to her friends when they appeared upon the scene.

Having thus obeyed the voice of his conscience, Bors now spurred his horse and hastened down the road where he had seen his brother disappear. He had not gone far, however, when he met a man in the robe of a priest riding a great black charger.

"Where are you going so fast, Sir Knight?" this man called out.

"Do not detain me, I pray you," replied Bors, "for I am speeding to overtake two rogues who are carrying my brother away a prisoner!"

"Then it will be useless for you to go any farther," said the priest, "for the wicked men have already killed your brother and disposed of his body in the mere. Come with me now to a castle near by where you can spend the night."

So Bors turned sadly and rode with the stranger, relating his story as he went.

"Did I do right," he inquired at last, "to forsake my brother and rescue the woman?"

"No," answered the priest, "you did wrong, and you are responsible for your brother's death. Therefore you may as well give up the Quest, for only harm can come of your following it now."

Thereupon Bors grew sadder than ever, and took no notice of the road until he realized that they were drawing rein before the gate of a fair white castle. There a young and strangely beautiful woman came forward to meet them, followed by a troop of maidens almost as fair as she. They welcomed Bors with especial warmth, and led him into a stately banquet hall, where a feast was spread of all the delicacies of which he had been so long deprived.



A YOUNG AND STRANGELY BEAUTIFUL WOMAN

“Eat and drink, Sir Knight,” said the mistress of the castle, “and afterwards you may join us in our games and dances.”

But Bors answered:

“Fair Lady, I am one of the Grail seekers, and cannot turn from the Quest for any pleasure. Furthermore I am bound by a promise to eat nothing but dry bread and to drink nothing but pure water until I achieve the open vision. I pray you, therefore, to excuse me.”

To which the lady replied:

“Sir Knight, has not this good priest told you that your search is in vain because your brother’s blood will be required at your hands? Forget that you ever set out upon this mad Quest, and remain here with us and be happy like other men.”

At this the maidens one and all stretched out to him soft, white, appealing hands of entreaty as they echoed the words of their mistress:

“Yes, stay with us and be happy like other men.”

Then Bors hesitated. Before him rose on the one hand a picture of his lonely rides along desolate, man-deserted, God-forsaken roads, and on the other that of this gorgeous hall with its feasting and laughter, sweet music and fair faces. Then his eyes wandered over the dainty dishes to the rosy cheeks and merry glances of the maidens until he had all but yielded, when they chanced to alight upon the object by which he had made his vow—the cross-shaped hilt of his trusty sword.

In another instant he had seized it, drawn it from its scabbard, and was holding it aloft. Then a strange thing happened: A great cry burst from the lips of mistress and maidens, while the black garb of the so-called priest dropped from his shoulders revealing him as the wicked creature he was. A great wind began to sweep over the castle accompanied by deafening thunder and blinding flashes of lightning; then, in another moment, castle and priest and maidens had vanished from his sight, and Bors found himself standing by a wide stretch of sea, still holding aloft the sacred symbol which had been the means of his salvation. By his side he presently distinguished the form of his good friend, the kindly hermit, who said to him gladly:

“Bors, Bors, thank God you have overcome your two great temptations! That man, dressed like a priest, was in fact a wicked

enchanter, and the woman was likewise an enchantress whose sole aim at present is to prevent the Grail-seeking knights from achieving the Quest. You did right when you rescued the woman rather than your brother, and furthermore Lionel is not dead, for he was saved by Gawain who chanced to be riding that way; and some day you will see him again."

While the good man had been speaking, Bors had espied a speck of a sail on the far horizon which had gradually drawn nearer until now he perceived that a little vessel covered with a wondrous canopy of white samite lay moored near the shore.

"Bors," continued the hermit, "now I may tell you with certainty that you are one of the three who shall see the Grail in open vision. Enter into that ship, therefore, and await in peace such adventures as may come to you."

So Bors obeyed, and presently felt himself being borne swiftly out to sea.

THE ADVENTURE OF SIR PERCIVAL

And now we come to the adventure that befell Percival the Pure whose place had ever been the very next to the Siege Perilous, and whose soul was beyond the reach of such temptations as assailed Launcelot and Bors.

Some days after his parting with his companions he met with twenty armed knights of ferocious aspect who demanded his name and his errand.

"I am Percival of Arthur's Round Table," he replied, "and I ride in Quest of the Holy Grail."

"Then we will slay you!" they all cried together. "for we are the bitter enemies of King Arthur, and of all those who have set out upon that mad Quest."

Thereupon they dropped their spears and charged upon him in a body. The first and the second and the third he was able to overthrow; but when they continued to rush upon him from all sides, he could no longer defend himself, so that presently his good steed was killed, and he lay helpless among them awaiting death.

Suddenly the sound of a galloping horse's hoofs struck his ear, then he caught sight of the flash of bright, flame-colored armor coming directly towards him. In another moment this strange knight

was among his captors, striking right and left with his sword. None who felt one stroke lingered to encounter a second. Some fled in terror, while many more dropped never to rise again; so that very soon Percival saw that not one of his tormentors was left to do him harm. Thereupon the knight in the flame-colored armor, waiting for no thanks, wheeled his horse and vanished like a sunbeam amid the shadows of the forest.

Gladly would Percival have followed his rescuer, for he knew full well that the strange knight was Galahad; but, alas! his good and faithful steed lay dead by his side! He could think of nothing better to do, therefore, than to pursue on foot the road down which the great Galahad had disappeared; so he plodded wearily on his way while all grew dark about him, until at last, from sheer exhaustion he sank upon the ground and was soon fast asleep.

When he awoke the moonlight was sifting down through the foliage, so that in the weird light he was able to distinguish the form of a strangely beautiful woman standing by his side.

"Sir Knight," said she, "why are you lying here by the roadside like a beggar?"

"Because, fair Lady," said he, "my horse has been killed, and I have walked until weariness overcame me."

"Was your errand, then, so very pressing?" and the voice of the woman had grown soft and sweet and alluring.

"It was, fair Lady, and it still is," replied Percival, "for I am in Quest of the Holy Grail; and I took this road along which Sir Galahad has preceded me, because I know that he at least shall achieve the open vision."

"If that is your errand, Sir Knight, I would speed you with all my heart," said the woman still in that soft, caressing tone. "Will you, therefore, accept a swift steed from me?"

Percival thanked her gratefully, whereupon she disappeared to return presently with a handsome black charger richly caparisoned. In another moment, overjoyed at the thought of being able to proceed without further loss of time, Percival leaped into the saddle; but, before he could turn to express his gratitude once more, the horse was away like the wind, so that, experienced rider though he was, he found great difficulty in keeping his seat. Presently he discovered that he could neither stop nor turn the beast and that they

were going at such a tremendous pace that within an hour they had completed a full four-days' journey. Then, all at once, he heard the roar of rough water just ahead of him, and realized that his steed was about to plunge straight into the ocean with his rider still on his back.

Thus the end of the Quest and of all earthly things seemed to be at hand, but just at that moment Percival bethought himself of his sword, and struck the horse's neck with its cross-shaped hilt. Instantly the beast took a great leap into the air, thus unseating his rider who fell backwards upon the soft sand of the shore. Yet the horse never stopped, but plunged madly into the waves and disappeared in the midst of a bright blue flame which was presently extinguished by the water leaving a thick black smoke behind.

When this had cleared away Percival arose to find standing beside him a kind-faced man in the dress of a hermit.

"Good Knight," said the stranger, "you have had a narrow escape. That steed which you rode was not a horse at all, but a fiend sent by the powers of darkness to prevent, if possible, your achieving the Quest. The

beautiful woman who gave him to you is a wicked enchantress from whose clutches Bors has but lately escaped."

"Ah! Holy Man," exclaimed Percival, "tell me, if you can, shall I ever behold the Sacred Cup?"

"Yes," was the comforting reply, "you are one of the three to whom the open vision will in time be granted. Step into that little boat which lies yonder amid the rocks, and rest in peace for a season."



"THEN HE SAW THAT THE MAN WAS BORS"

Then Percival looked, and beheld a tiny craft covered with a canopy of rich white samite. He stepped on board, therefore, and was soon fast asleep. When he awoke he realized that he was upon the high seas, and that a man was bending over him. Then he saw that the man was Bors.

GLOSSARY 10

1. *Caparisoned*, harnessed ready for battle (said of a war-horse).
2. *Chalice*, a consecrated cup.
3. *Charger*, a war-horse.
4. *Exploit*, a deed marked by heroism or bravery.
5. *Grail*, a consecrated cup.
6. *Hermit*, one who lived in solitude for religious worship.
7. *Hermitage*, the dwelling place of a hermit.
8. *Impede*, to hinder.
9. *Mere*, a pond, pool, or lakelet.
10. *Samite*, a cloth like satin with glistening threads of silver and gold.
11. *Palfrey*, a saddle horse (not a war-horse).

The Achieving of the Quest

“Then suddenly he fell asleep in Christ,
 And a great multitude of angels bore
 His soul to Heaven. And out of Heaven there came
 The semblance of a Hand, that, reaching down,
 Caught up the Grail, and no man saw it more.”

WESTWOOD'S "Legend of the Syren Isles."

ALTHOUGH he had come to Camelot weaponless, Galahad had, as we know, soon won for himself a sword; yet he was still without a shield when he parted from his companions at the cross-roads. Thus he rode, therefore, but half-armed, for several days alone, until one afternoon toward evensong he chanced upon an abbey where he begged shelter for the night. There he found that another of the Grail-seekers, Sir Bagdemagus by name, had preceded him.

As the two sat talking with the monks, the good brothers told them of a certain shield which had been in their abbey longer than the oldest man among them could remember, and about which there was a prophecy to the effect that none but the best knight in all the world might ever carry it without coming to grievous harm.

Upon hearing this Sir Bagdemagus, who seems to have been a man somewhat on the order of poor Balin the Savage, exclaimed enthusiastically:

“To-morrow I will try this adventure, and if I fail, you, Sir Galahad, may try it after me!”

Accordingly, the following morning, as soon as they had heard mass, the Abbot himself, at the request of his guest, brought forth from its long resting place behind the high altar the mystic shield and bound it upon the knight's neck, saying gravely:

“Sir Bagdemagus, I warn you to consider well before you bear this scutcheon in joust or battle.”

And indeed its very appearance might have caused a more cautious man to hesitate, for it was a wondrous thing with a ground as white as snow upon which had been blazoned a blood-red cross.

But Bagdemagus, quite undaunted, took it vauntingly, saying, however, to Galahad:

“Remain here for a short time, I pray you; and if I fail my squire shall ride back to bring you the scutcheon.”

So the rash fellow set out and had scarcely gone two miles before he beheld coming directly toward him with lowered lance a knight clothed in snow-white armor riding a milk-white steed. No sooner had the two crashed together than the stranger’s spear, glancing past his opponent’s shield, struck Bagdemagus through the shoulder so that he was instantly hurled from his horse. Thereupon the White Knight dismounted also, and took the cross-emblazoned scutcheon from his fallen foe, exclaiming:

“Sir Bagdemagus, it was folly for you to bear this shield. Were you not warned that none save the best and the purest might carry it in safety?”

Then turning to the squire he placed the mysterious thing in his hand saying:

“Bind your master upon his horse, and take him back to the abbey where, perchance, he may be healed of his wound. But deliver this shield to Sir Galahad only, and bear him my greetings.”

The stranger vanished, and the squire obeyed his instructions, so that by noon on that self-same day it was Galahad’s turn to fare forth upon the Quest with the mystic scutcheon bound about his neck.

He had not gone far, however, when he, too, chanced to meet with the White Knight, who, instead of putting his spear in rest, reined his horse and greeted Galahad most courteously.

“Sir Knight,” said he, “that shield which you bear has truly a marvelous history.”

“So I am beginning to think, Fair Stranger,” replied Galahad. “Will you be so kind as to relate it to me?”

“Gladly,” was the answer; “it runs thus: In the days of Joseph of Arimathaea there reigned in the far-away city of Sarras a king

whose name was Evelake. He was converted to Christianity by the preaching of the saintly Joseph, and bore that shield in a great battle that he waged against the heathen. When the victory was won, Joseph took the shield, which had been blank till then, and, with his finger traced upon it the outlines of that scarlet cross, saying, that the color would never grow dim until the last man of his own lineage should bind it upon his neck and thus fare forth on the Quest of the Holy Grail. When Joseph came to Britain, bearing the Sacred Cup, he brought this shield also and hid it away in the monastery to await your coming, Sir Galahad. Take it, therefore, and go forward until you attain the perfect vision."

Having spoken thus, the White Knight suddenly vanished, and Galahad rode on his way alone meeting with many minor adventures, some of which have already been related, such as his joust with Launcelot and his rescue of Percival.

One day in his wanderings he chanced upon the same half-ruined chapel where Launcelot had slept at the foot of the stone cross. He stepped inside and kneeled before the altar praying for counsel as to what to do next, and as he prayed he seemed to hear a voice saying:

"Go, Galahad, to the Castle of the Maidens and redress the wrongs of that wicked place."

So he arose and fared on his way until he saw looming before him in the distance a strong fortress with a deep moat around it and a fair river running by. Seeing an old man hobbling along by the roadside, Galahad drew rein and inquired:

"Good Sir, can you tell me the name of that castle yonder?"



A KING WHOSE NAME WAS EVELAKE
Potemkin, Carreno de Miranda. Prado, Madrid.
[Courtesy Braun e Cie.]

"That," was the reply, "is the Castle of the Maidens; and an accursed place it is, full of mischief and villainy! I advise you, Sir Knight, as you value your life, to turn back."

But Galahad answered:

"I thank you, friend, but because of the danger I will ride on," and he spurred his horse accordingly.

Presently he met with seven maidens who seemed to be fleeing from some danger unseen by him, and they called out to him in warning:

"Sir Knight, you ride in great peril. We advise you to turn back!"

Last of all he was stopped by a young squire who delivered to him the following message:

"Sir Knight, the masters of this castle defy you, and bid you come no farther on peril of your life unless you will show them what your business here is!"

"My business," replied Galahad unflinchingly, "is to destroy the wicked custom of this castle."

"Then you will have much to do," said the squire, with a shrug of his shoulders.

But Galahad only spurred his horse once more and rode forward until he saw, issuing from the castle gate, seven mighty knights in black armor bearing deadly black weapons. With one furious bound they were upon him, but he, thrusting forth his spear, smote the foremost to the ground and managed to ward off the blows of the others whose lances, the moment they came in contact with the mystic shield, were shivered in pieces. Then he drew out his trusty sword and set upon his opponents so fiercely that he drove them before him, step by step, to the very gate where he slew them to the last man.

And now he was able to pass as far as the inner portal of the castle, where he was greeted by the keeper, an aged man in cloak and hood of purest white.

"Galahad," said the warder, "thank God you have now overcome the brothers of darkness, the Seven Deadly Sins, who for long years have kept imprisoned the gentle maidens known as the Virtues, and have slain every knight who has tried to come to the rescue. Take, therefore, the keys to the castle, for you have vanquished those who menaced the integrity of your soul."

So Galahad obeyed, reverently unlocking the inner gate and passing in to the fortress where he was greeted by a great multitude of fair maidens, pure and sweet as flowers upon which the morning dew still sparkles, who gathered about him shyly to express their gratitude.

"Brave and noble Knight," said they, "you are welcome indeed; long have we awaited this deliverance!"

Then they told him of the wicked custom of the castle, and of the seven cruel brothers whose delight had been the slaying of good knights, who rode accompanied by fair damsels, so that they might capture the maidens and make them prisoners behind those gloomy walls.

"In fact, of late," they added, "they have slain every knight who rode by, because she who is the true mistress of the castle, from whom they took it by force of arms, had prophesied that one day a man who rode alone would overthrow them all."

"And where is this lady?" inquired Galahad.

"She languishes," was the reply, "in the deepest and darkest dungeon of the fortress. She is the fairest of our number, Sir Knight, for her name is Love."

Then Galahad turned and strode through many a winding passage, opening doors that had long remained closed, sometimes almost losing his way in the gloom, until at last he found the dungeon which, however, was illumined by the very presence of that loveliest of all the Virtues in whom no darkness is. Then he released the maiden, restoring to her her lost inheritance, and causing all the barons of the country to do her homage. After which, with perhaps his first lingering look behind, he mounted his horse and fared forth once more upon the Quest.

It was not long after this adventure that he found himself accepting the hospitality of the same kindly hermit who had entertained Launcelot and Bors; and that night, while the weary Galahad slept, a maiden appeared to the holy man requesting speech with his guest and refusing to wait until morning.

"Sir Galahad," said she, when he had come forth to greet her, "you must ride with me at once."

And in spite of the strangeness of the request, Galahad prepared to obey, for both he and the hermit felt that it was the right thing

for him to do. So he armed himself, leaped on his charger, and followed his guide for the remainder of the night through the deep shadows of the forest until, when morning dawned, he saw before him a vast expanse of sea. Near the shore there lay moored a little ship with the wondrous canopy of white samite.

The maiden tied her palfrey to a tree, bidding Galahad do likewise with his charger, then she preceded him on board the boat, where to his surprise and joy, he found Bors and Percival apparently anxiously awaiting his coming. When the first glad greetings were over, the maiden who had been his guide turned to Percival, inquiring:

“Sir Knight, do you know me?”

“No,” replied Percival in wonder, “fair Maiden, I do not.”

“I am your sister,” said she, “whom you have not seen since I entered the convent and you rode away to become a knight of the Round Table.”

Then, before her brother had fully recovered from his surprise, she added gravely:

“But come, all three of you, that I may show you the marvels of our little vessel.”

Wondering more and more the young men followed her until they came to a table upon which was lying a sword in a scabbard of serpent's skin. The hilt was of finest gold set with lustrous jewels, and all about the weapon was beautiful except the girdle which was fastened to it. This seemed to be made of frayed hemp—neither strong nor fair.

“Sir Galahad, this sword is for you,” said Percival's sister. “Henceforth you will need a better one even than that which you drew from the marble. There is none stronger than this, unless it be Excalibur, for it belonged to King David in ages past; and this little ship was built for you by his son Solomon, who, as you know, was the wisest man that ever lived. He had a wife, however, who in one thing was wiser than he, for when he bid her make a girdle that should be worthy of so wondrous a weapon, she, to his dismay, made this, saying that it should remain upon the sword until the coming of the best knight in all the world, at which time a new belt would appear representing a maiden's sacrifice of the thing of which she was most proud in all the world. Then Solomon acknowledged

his wife's wisdom, and, having laid sword and sheath and girdle in this ship, which he called Faith, set the tiny craft adrift upon the blue waters of the Mediterranean where it has floated up and down ever since, unseen by man, awaiting your coming, Oh Galahad, the one perfect knight without fear and without reproach!"

"That is a wondrous story indeed," said Galahad, taking up the sword that he might examine it more closely. "But where, after all, is the girdle, for this will scarcely hold?"

Then the maiden drew forth from the folds of her garments a silver casket which she opened with a tiny golden key that hung about her neck. Within lay a belt that seemed to have been spun from the finest threads of purest gold, so soft was it to the touch and so brightly did it sparkle in the morning sunlight. With hands that trembled slightly she fastened the sword to it and then bound it to Galahad's side, saying softly:

"My knight, my love, my knight of heaven,
Oh thou, my love, whose love is one with mine,
I, maiden, round thee, maiden, bind my belt.
Go forth, for thou shalt see what I have seen,
And break through all, till one will crown thee king
Far in the spiritual city."

And as she spoke, sending the deathless passion in her eyes through him till he, too, believed in her belief, he perceived that the girdle was made of the maiden's own beautiful hair which she had cut off upon forsaking the world for the cloister. Presently he realized that she was speaking again.

"My work is ended now," she was saying in a voice in which there was no trace of sadness. "My soul will soon be free. Therefore do not grieve for me, but set my body adrift in a little boat that you will find when the time comes. Then continue on your way to the Castle of Carbonek where King Pelles awaits you for the healing of his wound."

And, indeed, within a few days it had all fallen out just as the maiden had foretold, so that one fair morning when Percival's sister was no more, the three knights found themselves nearing land with the towers and battlements of Carbonek looming out of the mist

before them. In their case, however, there were no lions to bar the way, but respectful porters who threw wide the gates at their approach as if they were expected guests.

They were presently ushered into the same great banquet hall where Balin had for the first and last time come face to face with his mortal foe; but there was no feast in progress now. The knights and ladies of the court were there assembled it is true; yet a strange hush seemed to have settled over the entire company, for on a dais, elevated above their heads, lay the wounded King with eyes closed, and a pallor on his cheeks that might well have been mistaken for the pallor of death had not a breath like a deep sigh escaped his white lips from time to time.

Presently, as the three knights stood gazing in mute surprise at the strange scene, a door at the farther end of the hall swung noiselessly back upon its hinges, and Galahad alone, of all the company, became aware of the fact that a marvelous procession of Mysteries was about to pass through the chamber. Bors and Percival saw only a glorious light, and the other occupants of the room apparently saw nothing at all.

First came that familiar white-robed figure whose face was concealed by no hood now, but upon whose head sparkled a golden crown. He bore before him, held aloft in both hands, the Mystic Grail itself, covered with white silk, through the transparent texture of which a soft ruby glow penetrated illuminating the whole room. Behind him came a maiden in the scarlet robe of shame bearing upon a golden salver the halo-circled head of John the Baptist; and following her were two knights each with a seven-branched golden candlestick; while last of all there appeared another knight carrying the bleeding spear with which Balin so long ago had dealt the Dolorous Stroke.

And now, upon sight of that spear, Galahad suddenly came to a full realization of his errand in the Castle of the Grail. With a heart filled with pity for human sin and suffering such as he, in his utter purity, had never known before, he stepped forward and touched the bleeding point of the mystic spear, then he mounted to the King's side and applied that drop of blood to the gaping wound.

Thereupon a wondrous thing happened: For one brief moment the long-suffering monarch stood erect upon his feet with life and

health bounding once more through his veins as in the days of his youth.

“Galahad! Galahad! my grandson!” he cried. “How long have I awaited your coming and this glad day which marks at once the hour of my healing and of my blessed release from the thralldom of this world! But your work here, my son, is now accomplished: for you have healed my wound and you have seen the Grail once more. Henceforth your duty lies far from the Island of Britain in the spiritual city—the city of Sarras. To-morrow you must leave this land with your faithful companions, and the Holy Grail will go with you, for you are now its Keeper on the Earth.”

And with those words a light of joy unspeakable broke upon the old King’s face. Whereupon he raised his eyes to heaven while his body sank lifeless at Galahad’s feet.

The following morning, according to King Pelles’ dying command, as well as in obedience to Galahad’s own inner promptings, the three knights set sail once more in the Ship of Solomon. In the bow of the little craft shone a wondrous light which Galahad alone was able to recognize as proceeding from the Holy Grail, which was held in tender solicitude by an angel who was also guiding the frail bark of human faith on its perilous journey across the boisterous sea.

Thus they sailed for many days in sunlight and moonlight and starlight, and the Grail was ever with them, so that they knew neither hunger nor cold nor weariness, until at last, rising from the blue waves of the Mediterranean, they beheld the turrets and towers and battlements of the city of Sarras—the spiritual city—over which King Evelake had ruled in the long ago.

The angel had left them now, and the Grail stood upon a table of gold and silver in the bow of the boat; but it proved far too heavy to lift even with the combined strength of the three mighty knights. As they drew to their moorings, therefore, Galahad seeing a wretched cripple sitting by the water’s edge, cried out to him:

“Come and help us, we pray you, to carry ashore this table with its sacred burden!”

The old man raised his bleared eyes which saw nothing but the table in question, and answered in a shaking voice:

“Alas! Stranger, I cannot help you, for it is many years since I stood upon my feet.”

“Nevertheless,” replied Galahad, “come and do your best.”

With that the cripple stretched forth his hands in an effort to rise, whereupon he felt a sudden rush of healthy blood coursing through his veins, and leaping joyfully forward was able to assist the knights in bearing their precious burden to the altar of the great cathedral.

Naturally it was not long before the news of this and of other wonders was spread abroad through the town; and one or two ancient inhabitants went so far as to declare that the shield borne by the knight in the flame-colored armor was none other than the one which had belonged to their own King Evelake of sainted memory.

But he who at that time was sitting upon the throne of Sarras was a usurper and a cruel tyrant. Therefore, when these rumors reached his ears, he called to mind an old prophecy which foretold that a man bearing such a shield should some day appear to reign over the spiritual city. Without loss of time he sent for the strangers saying that he wished to make them welcome at his court. But no sooner were they in his power than he caused them to be seized and thrown into the deepest and darkest dungeon of his castle.

Strange to say, however, it was not the prisoners who languished, for to them the Holy Grail, though always veiled, appeared daily, transforming their dismal cell into the fairest palace that the heart of man could conceive, and, as on board the ship, they knew neither hunger nor thirst nor weariness, but awaited only the rapturous moment when they might behold the Sacred Chalice in open vision.

With the King and his people, however, it was a very different matter. Plague and pestilence, drought and famine stalked abroad throughout the land, while the inhabitants whispered to one another with white, awe-stricken faces:

“Alas! these things have come upon us because our King has imprisoned the knight who bears the fateful shield!”

Many a deputation, therefore, did that stricken people send to their sovereign imploring the release of the captives, to all of which he turned a deaf ear, until one awful day he awoke to the fact that he himself was a victim of the deadly plague, and that he had not many hours to live.

Then in all haste he called for Galahad and his companions, saying, when the former stood before him in the full strength and vigor of his young manhood:

“Good Knight, my sins towards you have been my undoing, for you are that great one of whom the prophets have long foretold. Forgive me, and when I am gone reign here in my stead. Thus shall this wasted land be restored to peace and plenty once more.”

So was fulfilled the prophecy that Galahad, the knight without reproach, should sit upon the throne of good King Evelake, far away in the spiritual city.

And now followed happy days for the people of Sarras. Their new King soon caused a fair chest to be made and placed before the altar in the great cathedral before which he and his two companions knelt frequently in silent prayer. Rumor said that the chest contained the Holy Grail.

One day, however, never to be forgotten of his people, Galahad whispered to his two faithful friends that he had now finished his work on earth, and that the time of his departure was at hand.

“Come with me, therefore, to the Cathedral,” said he, “for when my spirit leaves my body, you as well as I shall achieve the open vision.”

They followed him in reverent silence to the holy place of worship, where, kneeling before the high altar they beheld once again the form of Joseph of Arimathaea in his cloak and hood of spotless white. In a moment the three knights had fallen on their knees behind him—Galahad a little nearer than the rest; and thus they remained, while the saintly old man arose to remove the Holy Grail from its resting place within the chest. Presently he held it aloft, and now all three realized that they could at last see it plainly, for it was shrouded by neither cloud nor covering of silk.

Nor was the light that streamed from it like the rosy glow of other days, for the blood which it contained now shone like a clear red gem resting in the pure crystal of the Cup. And as they gazed it became brighter and brighter, streaming up among the arches of the roof, so that it seemed almost to be bringing to life old pictures and statues that had long been dimmed by the dust of the years and the smoke of incense. Suddenly the air became tremulous with

melody. The very stones seemed to be bursting into the full harmony of song. The waves of music vibrated to and fro, now beating against the ancient walls, swelling into full chords like the roll of a mighty organ, then dying away into soft, far-reaching echoes melting into silence and infinite peace.

When the last note had sobbed itself into stillness, Joseph set the Grail upon the altar, then he turned toward the kneeling Galahad and kissed him on the forehead. As he did so, Bors and Percival perceived that the red robe of their beloved companion, the symbol of his earthly warfare, was about to drop from his shoulders, leaving him clothed in the spotless white garb of immortality.

Then suddenly Joseph and the Grail vanished from their sight, while all grew dark about them. After a while, however, they were able to distinguish the lifeless form of Galahad lying before them on the steps of the altar.

That day, among the poor, blinded people, there was dole in the city of Sarras; but Bors and Percival could not mourn—for they had seen.

Percival soon after found a cell outside the walls of the city where he lived for a short time the life of a hermit in fasting and prayer. And Bors stayed with him till he died; then he buried him beside Galahad in the great cathedral, after which he set sail for distant Britain. There he meant to relate to Arthur all his adventures in Quest of the Holy Grail, but when he saw the condition of the White King's once beautiful realm, he found his lips sealed so that he could only shake his head and answer with tears in his eyes:

“Ask me not, for I may not speak of it. Yes, I have seen.”

GLOSSARY 11

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| 1. <i>Abbey</i> , a monastery, the dwelling place of an abbot. | 9. <i>Lineage</i> , family. |
| 2. <i>Chalice</i> , a consecrated cup. | 10. <i>Moat</i> , a ditch outside the walls of a fortress. |
| 3. <i>Charger</i> , a war-horse. | 11. <i>Palfrey</i> , a saddle horse (not a war-horse). |
| 4. <i>Dais</i> , a raised platform. | 12. <i>Salver</i> , a tray of silver or other heavy metal. |
| 5. <i>Dole</i> , grief, mourning, lamentation. | 13. <i>Scutcheon</i> , a shield. |
| 6. <i>Emblazoned</i> , decorated with heraldic devices. | 14. <i>Squire</i> , one who waited upon a knight. |
| 7. <i>Evensong</i> , an evening service of prayer. | 15. <i>Warden</i> , a doorkeeper. |
| 8. <i>Grail</i> , a consecrated cup. | |

XII

The Passing of Arthur

“Then from the dawn it seem’d there came, but faint
As from beyond the limit of the world,
Like the last echo born of a great cry,
Sounds, as if some fair city were one voice
Around a king returning from his wars.

TENNYSON’S “Passing of Arthur.”

EVEN before the days of the great Quest, when the flower of chivalry bloomed at the height of its glory in Arthur’s halls, there had already crept into that Eden among the blossoms of loyalty, high ideals and purity, the green-eyed serpent Jealousy; and the traitor, so long unsuspected, was none other than the King’s own nephew, Mordred.

This Judas had watched Arthur’s rise to power and Launcelot’s ever-widening reputation for prowess with a heart growing more and more envious as the years went by; and always he had been waiting for an opportunity to carry out his wicked designs. To be sure, while the Round Table flourished, and when the King was constantly surrounded by his hundred and forty-eight faithful knights, there seemed little chance of his being able to do great harm; but now at last he believed that his hour had come.

One by one the broken remnant of the Grail-seekers had straggled back to Camelot. Yet when all had arrived who might ever be expected, there was but a tenth of the former number, and even these, for the most part, had passed through such terrible experiences that they were no longer the men they had been in the brave days of old; so that Arthur was forced to exclaim:

“Oh, my knights, was I too dark a prophet when I foretold that most of you would follow, not the holy light of the Grail, but wan-

dering fires that would lead you at last into the quagmire of doubt and empty dreams?"

Having thus spoken the King, in a vain attempt to persuade himself that all might yet be well with the realm if not with his own heart, raised to knighthood men to fill the vacant places, and these new knights with the remnant of the old Order rode forth to hawk and to hunt, to joust and to tourney, and to assail the heathen who now, more than ever, broke over the borders. Yet all was not as it had been, and Arthur knew it, and Bors and Launcelot and the fair Guinevere knew it, and, worst of all, Mordred knew it, and said to himself:

"Now is my time to strike!"

And strike he did in the spot where he knew the King to be most vulnerable, for he accused Launcelot, he whom Arthur loved and trusted above all other men, of treason; and so subtly did he mingle a grain of truth with the mass of his infamous lies that the King at last believed the slander, and with bitter words of reproach ordered his greatest knight from his realm.

But even before Launcelot could manage to make his escape to his own city of Benwick across the sea, a skirmish took place between the knights who remained on Arthur's side and those who took the part of Launcelot in that terrible civil strife; and in that encounter, where a man scarcely knew which was friend and which was foe, it chanced that the noble Gareth was slain, as was also his older brother Gaheris.

Thereupon Gawain, the one remaining son of good Queen Bellisent, maddened by the thought of the death of both his brothers, swore vengeance upon Launcelot whom he held responsible, and joined with Mordred, the depth of whose plot he did not suspect for a moment, in fanning the flame of the King's anger, so that at last the two together persuaded Arthur that Launcelot had withdrawn to Benwick to raise a force that he might return and march against Camelot. Then the King having marshalled his own troops turned to his nephew, saying:

"Mordred, I am about to lay siege to this traitor Launcelot before he has time to land in Britain. I leave you, therefore, because you are nearest to me in blood, to rule in my stead during my absence, and I also leave my Queen in your charge."

Then Mordred bowed low to conceal his crafty smile, for he saw that his plot was now working out to absolute perfection.

Within a few weeks, therefore, Arthur accompanied by Gawain, who still swore vengeance upon Launcelot, stood with a great army outside the gates of Benwick and challenged the inhabitants to combat. For a while, much to the King's surprise, there was no response; for Launcelot, wronged as he had been, still could not bear the thought of raising his hand against his Liege Lord and former friend, so that he was deaf to the entreaties of his knights who feared that his silence might be misinterpreted for cowardess.

The first to plead with him was our old acquaintance Sir Bagdemagus, who was now healed of the wound he had received from the White Knight when he had rashly borne the mystic shield intended only for Galahad. Said he:

"Launcelot, your courtesy will be our ruin, for Arthur's army will override the whole land and lay it waste while we hide here in our holes like frightened rabbits."

Then came the seven brothers of North Wales—men strong and brave as might be found in any land, saying:

"For the sake of your honor and ours, Sir Launcelot, give us leave to meet the enemy in the open field; for we have never been wont to cower behind castle walls!"

But Launcelot only shook his head sadly, saying:

"The enemy! Alas! I cannot fight against my King. Wait, I pray you, until I have sent a messenger to Arthur asking for a treaty of peace."

So the mighty Launcelot, he who had never quailed before sword or lance or battering-ram, sent forth a damsel accompanied by a dwarf to beg the King to return in peace to Britain; and doubtless Arthur, whose heart was no more in the war than Launcelot's, would have yielded to the entreaty had it not been for Gawain who still goaded him on; so that the reply was the leading of the royal host to the very walls of the city and the beginning of the siege.

Then at last Launcelot gave the word, and his army marched out in battle array from behind the walls of Benwick that they might meet the enemy in the open field.

All day long the terrible struggle raged, but Launcelot had given strict orders that harm should be done neither to the King nor to

Gawain; and the soldiers obeyed this command until Arthur, no longer realizing fully what he did, charged against the good Sir Bors, who, as Launcelot's cousin, was fighting on his relative's side. Bors met the charge with his spear, but in so doing threw the King from his horse.

Launcelot, however, who had himself taken little part in the combat, saw the fall of his life-long friend and dashed to where Arthur lay. Leaping from his own charger he raised the King from the ground, saying sadly:

"Sire, take my horse. You and your soldiers fight against me without mercy, but I cannot fight against my Sovereign nor see him overthrown."

Then Arthur, who could not look into his old friend's eyes, took the horse and rode from the field calling his men after him; and Launcelot with his army retreated into the city.

Now in all probability this would have ended the struggle, for the King's own noble nature was conquered by the nobility of Launcelot, but Gawain would not have it so, and, because Arthur flatly refused to send his army into the field again, made the following proposition:

"Sire," said he, "I will meet the traitor in single combat. Then we will fight until one shall kill the other, and that will end the war."

So a message to that effect was sent to Launcelot, and it was finally agreed that the two should meet the following morning just outside the gate of the city. Now Gawain had arranged that the contest should take place in the morning for the simple reason that, long before, a magician had bestowed upon him the gift of growing stronger every minute of the day from nine o'clock till noon, at which hour he possessed three times his natural strength, but immediately after which time he returned to his normal condition.

Launcelot, having never happened to joust with Gawain, knew nothing about this peculiarity, but he had not been fighting long on this day before he realized that he had an opponent of unusual prowess. In fact it seemed that he could not strike Gawain at all, but was forced to use all his strength in simple defense. So, for a long time neither was greatly harmed, but when high noon was passed Launcelot suddenly felt a change come over his antagonist.

Then he aimed a mighty blow so that Gawain fell badly wounded, and Launcelot stood still beside him, resting on his sword.

“Why do you stop fighting?” cried Gawain, maddened by the agony of his wound. “We have sworn to fight it out to the end, therefore kill me now and finish.”

“You know,” replied Launcelot gravely and sadly, “that a knight may not slay one who is helpless and least of all one who has been his friend.”

“Kill me and make an end!” persisted Gawain, “for I am no friend of yours; and I swear by the death of my two brothers that if you let me live I will fight you again as soon as I am able, unless you have grown too great a coward to risk the encounter!”

To this taunt, coming as it did from the lips of a man in terrible pain, Launcelot made no answer, but gave the order that Gawain be carried back to his tent while he himself returned to his own fortress.

Some weeks now passed by while Gawain lay ill of his wound, and during that time Arthur would doubtless have returned to Britain had he not feared the roughness of the journey for the sick man. No sooner, however, was Gawain on his feet once more than he challenged Launcelot for the second time. So they fought, and the combat ended just as it had the first time—Launcelot wounding Gawain in the very place where he had wounded him before, and Gawain vowing to continue the contest as soon as he was able, which he doubtless would have done had it not been for an occurrence which suddenly changed the plans of the King’s army.

One terrible day when Arthur, sick at heart and longing for a glimpse of Britain and his fair Queen, was sitting in the door of his tent, the following message was delivered into his hands:

“Your nephew, Mordred, has spread the report throughout the kingdom that you have been slain in battle. He has also caused himself to be crowned King in your stead, and is at this moment besieging the Queen in the Tower of London, whither she has fled for refuge, having refused to become his wife.”

Like a flash, as if the entire story had been written there on the fateful sheet that lay before him, Arthur understood at last the whole treacherous design of his nephew; and he realized in bitterness of spirit that his real enemy was Mordred and not Launcelot.

That very night, therefore, he gave the order for the army to begin its march toward the coast, so that when morning dawned, Launcelot looked out to behold the plain before the city walls evacuated, but he had no idea why the King had so suddenly raised the siege.

And now it was Gawain's turn to be filled with shame and grief, for he realized that he had been but playing into the hands of the traitor.

"Sire," said he to the harassed King, "I have helped to bring all this trouble upon you by my obstinacy concerning Launcelot, but I know now that his heart is still loyal to you as his whole behavior has shown. Send for him, therefore, I pray you; lay the full blame of this strife upon me; and ask his help in winning back Britain from Mordred."

But Arthur only shook his head and answered sadly:

"No, Gawain, we have gone too far, and I have wronged him too deeply. I cannot ask his help now. Henceforth I must fight my battles alone."

So the royal fleet of ships and galleys set sail for Dover, whither Mordred led his host to prevent, if possible, the King's landing. This he was not able to do, but a terrible battle took place in which many on both sides were killed or wounded. Mordred, however, was driven back and obliged to retreat. But when all was over it was found that Gawain had been wounded for the third time in the same place where Launcelot had wounded him; and now it was very evident that he had not long to live.

When he realized that, he secretly called a messenger to his side and gave him orders to proceed at once to Benwick where he was to tell Launcelot that the whole blame for the King's conduct lay with him, Gawain. And he was also to implore the great knight, in the name of the old friendships of the Round Table, to forgive the wrong that had been done him and to hasten with all speed to the aid of his Sovereign.

Of this message Arthur, of course, knew nothing; but Launcelot, you may rest assured, great, true-hearted, noble knight that he really was, never hesitated for a moment after it reached him, but set sail at once for Britain, where—such was the fatality that now seemed to hang over all that concerned the once flourishing Round Table—he arrived one day too late.

So Gawain, having with his last breath done his best to set things right, died; and then began the slow but sure retreat of Mordred before the royal army across the Island of Britain. Day by day the King pushed him farther and farther to the westward until at last both pursuer and pursued found themselves in Cornwall, where retreat was no longer possible. There each made ready for that dread battle in the west.

That night, however, the King had a strange dream. It seemed to him that there came, blown along lightly by a wandering wind, the ghost of Gawain, and as the phantom passed it cried:

“Hail, noble King! To-morrow if you fight you will pass away and woe will come to Britain. Therefore delay the battle for a season, for Launcelot and his knights are on their way to help you.”

The King awoke with a start, exclaiming:

“Who spoke? Was it a dream? It was like the voice of Gawain. Can it be that he haunts these wastes and wilds knowing that the end of the Round Table is at hand?”

Sir Bedivere who was the first man whom Arthur had knighted, and who was still his faithful follower in this hour of darkness, endeavored to reassure his Sovereign. Nevertheless, when morning came the King sent messengers to Mordred asking for a meeting that they might agree upon a truce.

Finally it was arranged that Arthur and Mordred, each accompanied by fourteen knights, should meet halfway between the lines of the two armies. Arthur, however, so shattered was his former faith in human nature, said to those of his men who were to remain behind:

“Watch, I pray you, for I suspect treachery; and if you see a sword drawn on either side, do not wait for any other signal but begin the battle at once.”

Now, as the ill-fortune of that fatal day would have it, while the King and his nephew were deep in conference, a small adder crept from under a bush and stung the foot of one of the knights. In an instant, forgetting the strict instructions as to the use of weapons, the man drew his sword to kill the snake, and the naked steel glittered for a moment in the morning sunlight. The royal army, however, too far off to see the adder, caught only the flash of that drawn sword and mistook it for a signal for battle. Then, though

neither Arthur nor Mordred realized in any way what had happened, while each suspected the other of treachery, the trumpets blew and the knights charged forward so that the two great waves of men and horses broke upon each other with a mighty crash and clang of arms—and thus was joined that last weird battle of the west.

All day long it raged while a death-white mist crept up from the sea, chilling the blood and blinding the eyes, so that friend slew friend, not knowing whom he slew. And all fought as men possessed, some haunted by visions of their youth and others by the faces of old ghosts upon the battle-field. The air was filled with the crash of splintering weapons and the shattering of helmet and armor mingled with the shouts of those who prevailed and the shrieks of the wounded and the moans of the dying.

All day long the forces swayed to and fro, until toward evening an unearthly hush fell upon the scene. Then a bitter wind from the north blew aside the mist, revealing to the few survivors the field of carnage over which the relentless tide was already creeping.

The King, however, still stood erect, and by his side were Bedivere and another faithful follower, Sir Lucan. As the three gazed upon the ghastly spectacle before them they suddenly beheld, rising victorious upon a heap of slain, the form of Mordred, the only survivor of his army.

But at that sight blind fury seized the King, and, brandishing Excalibur, he rushed forward like a lion and fell upon the traitor whom, with one terrible blow, he felled to the earth. In his eagerness, however, he had thought only of attack and nothing of defense. Thus it happened that Mordred, as he fell, struck the King, inflicting a deadly wound so that Arthur dropped fainting over his enemy's expiring body.

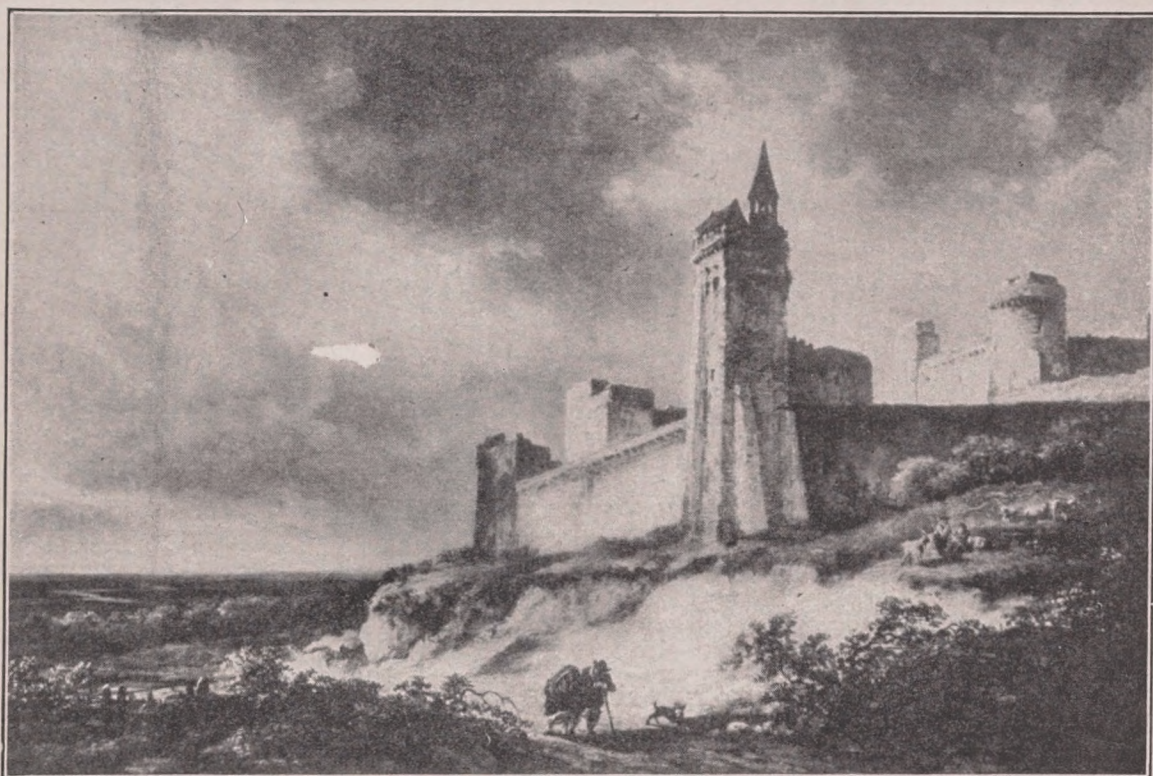
In a moment Bedivere and Lucan were at his side. Together they tried to lift him, but Lucan, faithful though he was, could serve his Sovereign no more, for he, too, had been wounded, and now, overcome by his last effort, dropped dead beside the body of Mordred, the traitor. And now Bedivere alone, of all the knights of the Round Table, was left to care for the stricken King.

Tenderly he bore him to a ruined chapel in a field near by, and there, at the foot of a broken cross, he ministered to him. Presently Arthur stirred slightly, then he opened his eyes and said brokenly:

“They sleep—the men I loved.” And a little later he whispered weakly, “I perish by the people whom I made! Over all is the trail of the serpent! Into every holy fellowship the Judas creeps!”

After a while, however, he was able to rouse himself and to speak in a firmer voice.

“Bedivere, my first and my last knight,” he said, “there yet



“A RUINED CHAPEL IN A FIELD NEAR BY”*

*Old Castle, Michel.

[Courtesy Braun et Cie.]

remains one thing that you may do for me before I pass to the vale of Avalon for the healing of my wound. Take Excalibur, throw it into the middle of the mere, then return quickly and tell me what you have seen.”

Strange words these about his passing, yet they echoed an old prophecy of Merlin's who, wise man though he was, had long since brought about his own destruction by his folly. Bedivere, however, took the wonderful weapon and climbed by a rugged, zigzagged path until he reached the shining levels of the lake. There he drew forth the sword and was about to fling it into the water, but, as he bran-

dished it aloft, the moon crept from behind a cloud and its light sparkled for a moment in the keen, frosty air upon the bejewelled hilt, revealing the two inscriptions which Bedivere was not able to read:

“TAKE ME” and “CAST ME AWAY.”

Then his purpose wavered, for he said to himself:

“After all, the King’s mind wanders; and if I throw this sword away what relic or record of my Lord will be left for future generations?”

So he took Excalibur and hid it among the many-knotted flags that whistled dry and stiff by the water’s edge. Then he strode back to the helpless King.

“Have you performed my mission?” inquired Arthur. “What have you seen and heard?”

“Sire, I heard the waters lapping on the rocks and washing among the reeds,” was the reply.

“Oh Bedivere!” cried the King. “You have betrayed the honor of your knighthood by acting out this lie! Return and throw the brand into the mere, then come back quickly and tell me what you have seen.”

So Bedivere departed a second time, but again the glitter of the jewels stayed his hand, and he returned without having accomplished his errand.

Then Arthur, breathing more heavily than before, repeated his question:

“What have you seen and heard?”

And Bedivere answered once again:

“I heard the water lapping on the crags, Sire, and the long ripple washing in the reeds.”

At this the King’s anger flamed.

“Traitor, unkind, untrue!” he cried in scorn, “you are the last of my knights left to me and you will not do my bidding. So does authority forget a dying king!”

Then Bedivere, who after all loved his Sovereign with all his heart, was filled with remorse and shame, and leaped along the path till he stood once more at the water’s edge. There he drew Excalibur from the bushes, and closing his eyes that he might not again

be tempted, hurled the beautiful sword with all his might toward the middle of the mere. Round and round it whirled, making lightnings in the splendor of the moon; but lo! before it reached the crest of the waves a mighty arm clothed in white samite rose from the bosom of the lake and caught it by the hilt, brandishing it three times, after which it drew the mystic weapon beneath the mere whence it had come.

Presently Bedivere, well-nigh overcome with awe and wonder, made his way back to the King's side; and Arthur, when he saw his knight's eyes, said as one whose mind was set at rest:

"Now I know, Bedivere, that you have obeyed my command."

After a while, when he had lain for some time in silence, he looked up into his knight's face saying softly:

"The end draws near. Carry me, I pray you, to the water's edge."

Bedivere, with tears in his eyes, obeyed; and as they reached the mere, shining in the pure cold light of the wintry moon, he beheld a dusky barge moving toward them. Its decks were thronged with black-robed figures whose faces were hidden in their hoods; but among the rest stood three queens in crowns of gold, and from them came a wailing sound of lamentation—a cry "that shivered to the tingling stars."

"Lay me in the barge," said the King faintly, as the little craft came to shore.

Presently the barge began to put off from the shore, and Bedivere was left standing alone crying brokenly:

"Ah whither shall I go, for the days of knightly glory are dead, and the Round Table is no more!"

Softly, faintly, across the gleaming waters came an answer in the King's own dear, familiar voice:

"Bedivere, do not grieve, but go your way and live out the rest of your life as duty calls you. My life's work is done, and I pass to the island-valley of Avalon, where come neither hail, nor snow, nor wind nor the sun's heat, but where all things rest and thrive amid wooded meadows ringed round with summer seas. Thither I go for the healing of my wound; and when I am well, perchance, should Britain need me, I will come again. Until then, for the old order changes yielding place to new, Farewell!"

Then the barge, like a full-breasted swan, moved farther and farther into the distance until Bedivere's straining eyes could see but its hull like one black dot against the dawn. Presently the wailing died away along the mere, while the lonely knight's cry of despair seemed answered in the words of Merlin's weird rhyme:

"From the great deep to the great deep he goes."

And then, with the dawn there seemed to come, faintly as from beyond the limits of the world, a sound like the last echo of a great burst of triumph, as if the people of some fair city were welcoming their king, returning victorious from his wars.

Such was the passing of Arthur; but what of the two who had been nearest and dearest to him in life?

Guinevere, when she heard the news of that terrible battle, left the Tower of London and sought retreat among the sisters in the abbey of Almesbury, and after a while she took the veil herself. There she lived a gentle, patient, helpful life, caring for the sick and ministering to the poor, until, at the death of the Abbess, she was selected to fill the vacant place. So, for the last three years of her life, Guinevere, the former Queen of Britain was Abbess of Almesbury.

And Launcelot, who with all his anxious haste to reach his Sovereign, had nevertheless arrived too late—he likewise, forsaking the helmet for the cowl, passed from the noisy life of arms and acts of prowess done in tournament and tilt into the silent life of prayer; and with him into his retreat went Bedivere and Bors. Thus was fulfilled the prophecy that the mighty Launcelot of the Lake, against whose soul the powers of darkness had waged relentless warfare, should die a holy man.

GLOSSARY 12

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| 1. <i>Abbess</i> , the lady superior of a nunnery. | 8. <i>Hawk</i> , to hunt by means of trained hawks instead of dogs. |
| 2. <i>Adder</i> , a viper, a snake. | 9. <i>Helmet</i> , a covering of armor for the head. |
| 3. <i>Battering-ram</i> , a long beam, usually with a heavy head, used in making breaches in walls. | 10. <i>Holy Man</i> , a monk. |
| 4. <i>Brandish</i> , to wave or shake a weapon. | 11. <i>Judas</i> , the disciple who betrayed Christ with a kiss; therefore, a traitor. |
| 5. <i>Carnage</i> , great slaughter. | 12. <i>Mere</i> , a pond, pool, or lakelet. |
| 6. <i>Cowl</i> , a monk's hood. | 13. <i>Quagmire</i> , soft, marshy ground, a bog. |
| 7. <i>Galley</i> , a vessel propelled by oars. | 14. <i>Truce</i> , temporary suspension of a contest. |

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